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THE CONQUEST OF ENGLAND



THE CONQUEST
OF
ENGLAND

BY

JOHN RICHARD GREEN M.A., LL.D.

HONORARY FELLOW OF JESUS COLLEGE, OXFORD

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

WITH PORTRAIT AND MAPS

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PREFACE

A FEW words of introduction are needed to the following unfinished story of the “Conquest of England,” in which I may explain how far these pages in their present form represent the final work and intention of their writer. I cannot do this save by giving some short account of how the book was written, and the tale of the two works, the “Making of England” and the “Conquest of England,” forms in fact but one story.

After Mr. Green had closed the fourth volume of his *History of the English People*, an apparent pause in the illness against which he had long been struggling made it seem possible that some years of life might yet lie before him. For the first time he could look forward to labour less fettered and hindered than of old by stress of weakness, in which he might gather up the fruit of past years of preparation; and with the vehement

ardour of a new hope he threw himself into schemes of work till then denied him. But he had scarcely begun to shape his plans when they were suddenly cut down. In the early spring of 1881 he was seized by a violent attack of illness, and it needed but a little time to show that there could never be any return to hope. The days that might still be left to him must henceforth be conquered day by day from death. In the extremity of ruin and defeat he found a higher fidelity and a perfect strength. The way of success was closed, the way of courageous effort still lay open. Touched with the spirit of that impassioned patriotism which animated all his powers, he believed that before he died some faithful work might yet be accomplished for those who should come after him. At the moment of his greatest bodily weakness, when fear had deepened into the conviction that he had scarcely a few weeks to live, his decision was made. The old plans for work were taken out, and from these a new scheme was rapidly drawn up in such a form that if strength lasted it might be wrought into a continuous narrative, while if life failed some finished part of it might be embodied in the earlier *History*. Thus under the shadow of death the *Making of England* was begun. During the five summer months in which

it was written that shadow never lifted. It was the opinion of his doctors that life was only prolonged from day to day throughout that time by the astonishing force of his own will, by the constancy of a resolve that had wholly set aside all personal aims. His courage took no touch of gloom or disappointment; every moment of comparative ease was given to his task; when such moments failed, hours of languor and distress were given with the same unfaltering patience. As he lay worn with sickness, in his extreme weakness unable to write a line with his own hand, he was forced for the first time to learn how to dictate; he had not even strength himself to mark the corrections on his printer's proofs, and these too were dictated by him, while the references for the volume were drawn up as books were carried one by one to his bedside, and the notes from them entered by his directions. With such sustained zeal, such eager conscientiousness was his work done, that much of it was wholly rewritten five times, other parts three times; till as autumn drew on he was driven from England, and it became needful to bring the book rapidly to an end which fell short of his original scheme, and to close the last chapters with less finish and fulness of labour.

The spring of 1882 found the same frail and suffering life still left to him. But sickness had no force to quench the ardour of his spirit. Careful only to save what time might yet remain for his work he hastened to England in May, and once more all sense of weakness seemed to vanish before the joy of coming again to his own land. He had long eagerly desired to press forward to later periods of English history, in which the more varied forces at work in the national life, and the larger issues that hung on them, might give free play to his own personal sympathies. But the conditions of his life shut out the possibility of choice; and he resolutely turned again to the interrupted history of early England, to take up the tale at the period of its greatest obscurity and difficulty. In the scheme which was drawn up at this time the present work was to have closed with the "Conquest of England" by the Danes. This plan was in fact a return to the division adopted in the *Short History of the English People*, where the conquest by Swein was looked on as the turning-point of the story, and a new period in the history of England began from the time when the English people first bowed to the yoke of foreign masters, and "kings from Denmark were succeeded by kings from Normandy, and these by kings from

Anjou." The eight chapters which bring the narrative to the Danish Conquest form the work that filled the last months of his life—a work still carried on with the same patient and enduring force, and done with that careful haste which comes of the knowledge that each month's toil may be the last. The book in this earlier form was finished and printed in the autumn, though in the pressing peril of the time the final chapters were so brief as to be scarcely more than outlines. Once more he was forced to leave England for the south. In spite of fast-increasing illness, and oppressed by heavy suffering, he there reviewed his whole work with earnest care. It seemed to him still far from his conception of what it might be ; the difficulty of the subject roused in him a fresh desire to bring it home with living interest to his readers ; and he believed this might be done by some added labour on his part. He resolved to make important changes in the original plan and in its order, to rewrite some portions, and to extend the history beyond the Conquest of England by the Danes to its Conquest by the Normans. The printed book was at once cancelled. With a last effort of supreme ardour and devotion, he set himself to a task which he was never to finish. A new opening chapter was formed by drawing

together the materials he possessed for a sketch of the English people at the opening of their long struggle with the invaders. But as the chapter drew towards its end his strength failed. The pages which now close it were the last words ever written by his hand—words written one morning in haste, for weakness had already drawn on so fast that when in weariness he at last laid down his pen he never again found strength even to read over the words he had set down.

But even then his work was not over. In this last extremity of weakness his mind still turned constantly to the story of his people. He would still hope, night by night, that on the coming day there might be some brief moment in which he could even yet dictate the thoughts that were shaping themselves in his mind—some larger account of the history of the English shires which was now taking form after long thinking, or some completer view of the rule of the Danish kings, or some insight of a more sure judgement and knowledge into the relations of the Norman Conquest. Many years before, listening to some light talk about the epitaphs which men might win, he had said half unconsciously, “I know what men will say of me: ‘*He died learning;*’” and he made the passing word into a noble truth. “So long as he

lived he strove to live worthily." By patient and laborious work, by reverence and singleness of purpose, by a long self-mastery, he had "earned diligently" his due reward in experience, knowledge, matured wisdom, a wider outlook, and a deeper insight. It was impossible for him not to know that his powers were only now coming to their full strength, and that his real work lay yet before him. "I have work to do that I *know* is good," he said when he heard he had only a few days to live. "I will try to win but one week more to write some part of it down." Another conquest than this however lay before him. It was as death drew nearer still that for the first time he said, "Now I am weary; I can work no more." Thus he laid down with uncomplaining patience the task he had taken up with unflinching courage. "God so granted it him." In those last days, as in his latest thoughts, the great love he bore his country was still as it had ever been the true inspiration of his life. The single aim that guided all his work till the end came, was the desire to quicken in others that eager sense which he himself had of how rich the inheritance of our fathers is with the promise of the future, and to bring home to every Englishman some part of the beauty that kindled his own enthusiasm in

the story, whether old or new, of the English People.

A very few words will explain the work which was left to me by my husband to do in preparing this volume for publication. In the earlier part of the book I have carried out the alterations in the order of subjects which had been decided on by him, and the first six chapters may be looked on as representing his final plan, save that some alterations would have been made in the first chapter, and some passages, such as the account of the shires, were not rewritten as he had intended. Chapters vii. and viii. were left in a wholly unfinished state, having been laid aside for consideration and revision. The materials for them had not even been drawn into any consecutive order, and I am responsible for the division and naming of these chapters, and in great part for the arrangement of the subjects.

The closing chapters (ix., x., xi.), which have been included in the book according to Mr. Green's later plan, stand on a different footing from the rest. They were written many years ago, I believe in 1875, and were then laid aside and never revised in any way. The materials for them existed partly in a printed form, and partly in manuscript notes

and papers, all alike written some years ago, and consisting merely of very rough and imperfect fragments hastily jotted down and then thrown aside. My work has been to draw these various parts together into a connected whole; and in order to carry on the unfinished tale to the Norman Conquest I have inserted some pages (vol. ii. pp. 295-306) from the earlier *History of the English People*. These chapters then, wholly unrevised and dealing with the history of the eleventh century in a partial way only, and under some of its aspects, must be looked on as incomplete outlines. It had been Mr. Green's hope to enrich them by a careful study of the social history of England during this period, and an indication of the kind of work that might have been done in this direction will be found in the passage (vol. ii. pp. 148-182) which describes London and the trading towns. This was part of his latest work last autumn, and has been inserted into the story of the reign of Cnut at his desire.

I have judged it best to print these closing chapters without any addition of reference or notes, save the few which I have been able to draw up from his own papers. Those who have read the *Making of England* will understand that Mr. Green was accustomed to base his views on wide and full reading, and I have been unwilling

to risk any system of notes which must inevitably have seemed to rest his conclusions on a foundation narrower than that of his own thought and reading. I have felt the less difficulty in adopting this course owing to the elaborate system of references for this period which Mr. Freeman has supplied to students.

I have been specially careful throughout the book to preserve the exact words of the writer, even in dealing with the unfinished manuscript notes. The exceptions to this rule are the two paragraphs that open chapter ii., which I myself added at his own request, and the greater part of the paragraph on the custom of the feud at vol. i. p. 308, which was left unfinished, and which I briefly concluded. The materials for the reign of Cnut were very imperfect, and occasionally, as in vol. ii. pp. 181-186, and again at the close of the chapter, I have been forced to make some expansions and alterations so as to form a consecutive and intelligible narrative. The character of Godwine in vol. ii. pp. 264-266 I have drawn up from some rough pencilled jottings on the margin of a paper, using the exact words I found, but shaping them into continuous sentences and a general order. The few notes which I have added throughout the book are all marked as my own.

Two of the maps included in this work, "England at the Peace of Wedmore," and "England under the Ealdormen," are taken from rough unrevised plans made by Mr. Green; for the rest of the maps I am myself responsible.

I cannot close without a very earnest expression of sincere gratitude to the friends who out of their generous affection for his memory have helped me in my task with constant and ready sympathy; I have especially to thank Professor Stubbs for the kindness with which he has read through my work, and given me the advantage of his counsel.

ALICE STOPFORD GREEN.

14 KENSINGTON SQUARE,
November, 1883.

P.S.—I may perhaps add that, with a view to future editions, it had been Mr. Green's intention to ask in the preface to this work for suggestions from those who may have any local knowledge which might help to throw light on any points either in this book, or in the *Making of England*. I should be glad, so far as lay in my power, to carry out his wishes in this matter.

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PORTRAIT

*Engraved by G. J. STODART, from a chalk drawing by
F. SANDYS*

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BRITAIN
and the
THREE KINGDOMS
under
ECGBERHT.

English Miles
0 20 40 60 80



THE CONQUEST OF ENGLAND

CHAPTER I

THE ENGLAND OF ECGBERHT

FEW periods of our history seem drearier and more unprofitable to one who follows the mere course of political events than the two hundred years which close with the submission of the English states to Ecgberht.¹ The petty and ineffectual strife of the Three Kingdoms, Northumbria, Mercia, and Wessex, presents few features of human interest, while we are without the means of explaining the sudden revolutions which raise and depress their power, or their final subsidence into isolation and inaction. It is only when we view it from within that we see the importance of the time. It was in fact an age of revolution, an age in which mighty changes were passing over every phase of the life of Englishmen; an age in which heathendom was passing into Christianity,

Social
changes in
Britain.

¹ See "Making of England," chap. viii. (A. S. G.)

CHAP. I. the tribal king into the national ruler, the ætheling into the thegn ; an age in which English society saw the beginnings of the change which transformed the noble into a lord, and the free ceorl into a dependent or a serf ; an age in which new moral conceptions told on the fabric of our early jurisprudence and in which custom began to harden into written law. Without, the new England again became a member of the European commonwealth, while within, the very springs of national life were touched by the mingling of new blood with the blood of the nation itself.

Character of its population. The ethnological character of the country had in fact changed since the close of the age of conquest. The area of the ground subject to English rule was far greater than in the days of Ceawlin or Æthelfrith, but in the character of its population the portion added was very different from the earlier area ; for while the Britons had been wholly driven off from the eastern half of the island, in the western part they remained as subjects of the conquerors. It was thus that in Ecgberht's day Britain had come to consist of three long belts of country, two of which stretched side by side from the utmost north to the utmost south, and the population of each of which was absolutely diverse. Between the eastern coast and a line which we may draw along the Selkirk and Yorkshire moorlands to the Cotswolds and Selwood, lay a people of wholly English blood. Westward again of the

Tamar, of the western hills of Herefordshire, and of Offa's Dyke, lay a people whose blood was wholly Celtic. Between them, from the Lune to the coast of Dorset and Devon, ran the lands of the Wealhcyn, of folks, that is, in whose veins British and English blood were already blending together and presaging in their mingling a wider blending of these elements in the nation as a whole.

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The winning of Western Britain opened in fact The mixture of race. a way to that addition of outer elements to the pure English stock which has gone on from that day to this without a break. Celt and Gael, Welshman and Irishman, Frisian and Flaman, French Huguenot and German Palatine, have come successively in, with a hundred smaller streams of foreign blood. The intermingling of races has nowhere been less hindered by national antipathy ; and even the hindrances interposed by law, such as Offa's prohibition of marriage between English and Welsh, or Edward III.'s prohibition of marriage between English and Irish, have met with the same disregard. The result is that so far as blood goes few nations are of an origin more mixed than the present English nation ; for there is no living Englishman who can say with certainty that the blood of any of the races we have named does not mingle in his veins. As regards the political or social structure of the people, indeed, this intermingling of blood has had little or no

CHAP. I. result. They remain purely English and Teutonic.

^{The}
^{England of}
^{Egberht.} The firm English groundwork which had been laid by the character of the early conquest has never been disturbed. Gathered gradually in, tribe by tribe, fugitive by fugitive, these outer elements were quietly absorbed into a people whose social and political form was already fixed. But though it would be hard to distinguish the changes wrought by the mixture of race from the changes wrought by the lapse of time and the different circumstances which surround each generation, there can be no doubt that it has brought with it moral results in modifying the character of the nation. It is not without significance that the highest type of the race, the one Englishman who has combined in their largest measure the mobility and fancy of the Celt with the depth and energy of the Teutonic temper, was born on the old Welsh and English borderland, in the forest of Arden.

^{Character of}
^{the country.} Side by side with this change in the character of its population had gone on a change in the character of the country itself. Its outer appearance indeed still remained much the same as in earlier days. Not half its soil had as yet been brought under tillage; as the traveller passed along its roads, vast reaches of forest, of moor, of fen, formed the main landscape before him; even the open and tilled districts were broken everywhere by woods and thickets which the farmer

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needed for his homestead, for his fences, for his house-building, and his fire. But limited as was its cultivation Britain was no longer the mere sheet of woodland and waste which the English had found it. Population had increased,¹ and four hundred years of labour had done their work in widening the clearings and thinning the woods. We have already caught glimpses of such a work in the moorlands of the north, in the fens of the Wash, in the thickets of Arden, as the monk carried his axe into the forest, or the thegn planted tillers over the grants that had been carved for him out of the waste “folk-land.” The study of such a tract as the Andredsweald would show the same ceaseless struggle with nature—Sussex-men and Surrey-men mounting over the South-downs and the North-downs to hew their way forward to the future meeting of their shire-bounds in the heart of the Weald, while the vast herds of swine that formed the advance guard of the Cantwara who were cleaving their way westward along the Medway, pushed into the “dens” or glades in the woodland beyond.

We can see the general results of this industrial warfare in a single district, such as Dorset. When the English landed in Britain no tract was wilder or less civilized; its dense forest-reaches in fact checked the westward advance of the conquerors,

Dorset

¹ Lingard (“Ang.-Sax. Church,” i. 185) infers this from the new upgrowth of churches.

CHAP. I. and forced them to make their way slowly along the coast from the Stour to the Exe. Even when <sup>The
England of
Eogberht.</sup> the Dorsætan were fairly settled there, the names of their hundreds and of the trysting places of their courts show the wild state of the land. The hundred-moots gather at barrow or den, at burn or ford, in comb or vale, in glade or woodland, here beside some huge boulder or stone, there on the line of a primæval foss-dyke, or beneath some mighty and sacred tree.¹ But even its hundred names show how soon the winning of the land began. Dorchester tells of the new life growing up on the Roman ruins, Knolton and Gillingham of the new "tons" and "hams" which rose about the settlements of the conquerors; while Beaminster, Yetminster, and Christchurch recall the work of the new Christendom that settled at last on the soil. Nowhere indeed was the industrial work of the Church more energetic; we have seen how Ealdhelm planted centres of agriculture as well as of religion at Sherborne and Wareham, and if more than a third of the shire belonged in later days to the clergy, it was in the main because monk and priest had been foremost in the reclama-

¹ For barrow-trysts, cf. Albretesberga (afterwards Cranbourne), Badbury, Modbury, Langeberga, Chalbury, Hunesberga; for "duns," Canendon (Wimbourne), Faringdon, Glochresdon; for boulders, Stane (Cerne Abbas), Golderonestone, some monolith by Burton Bradstock; for trees, Cuferdstroue, a tree on Culliford Barrow in Whitcomb parish; for foss, Concrestic or Combsditch; for glade, comb, burn, ford, wood, Cocden, Uggescomb, Sherborne, Tollerford, Ayleswood.

tion of the land.¹ Much indeed remained to be done. As late as the eve of the Norman conquest, but thirty or forty thousand inhabitants were scattered over the soil;² the king's forest-rights stretched over wild and waste throughout half the county, and even in the parts that had been won for culture, scrub and brushwood broke the less fruitful ground, while relics of the vanished woodland lingered in the copses beside every homestead, the "pannage woods" of beech and oak, and the "barren woods" of other timber that gave no mast to the swineherd.

But in spite of all, the work of civilization had begun. Little boroughs that, small as they were, already formed centres of social and industrial life were rising beside the harbours of the coast or clustering under the shelter of the great abbeys. Even where the bulk of the land lay waste, pastures stretched along the lower slopes of the moorland, whose herbage, though too rough and broken for the scythe, gave fair grazing ground to the herds of the township, while by stream and river ran the meadow-lands of homestead after homestead, clear of scrub and thicket, girt in by ditch and fence. About the homestead stretched the broad acres of the corn-land, with gangs of eight

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Its indus-
trial life.

¹ At the Conquest, the Bishop was the largest proprietor in the whole shire; he held in fact a tenth of it, while twice as much was held by religious houses at Shaftesbury, Cerne, Milton, and Abbotsbury.—Eyton, "Dorset Domesday," 156.

² Eyton, "Dorset Domesday," 152.

CHAP. I. oxen, each dragging its plough through the furrows. All the features of English life, in fact, all its characteristic figures were already there.

The England of Egberht. We see mills grinding along the burns, the hammer rings in the village smithy, the thegn's hall rises out of its demesne, the parish priest is at his mass-book in the little church that forms the centre of every township, reeves are gathering their lord's dues, forester and verderer wake the silent woodland with hound and horn, the moot gathers for order and law beneath the sacred oak or by the grey stone on the moor, along the shore the well-to-do salt-men are busy with their salt-pans, and the fishers are washing their nets in the little coast hamlets, and setting apart the due of fish for their lords.¹

Influence of Christianity. Side by side, however, with this industrial change in the temper and aspect of the country was going on a far more profound change in its moral life. We have already noted the more striking and picturesque sides of the revolution which had been wrought in the displacement of

¹ No manor was complete without its mill, and Domesday gives 272 mills in Dorset, some simply winter-mills, some on streamlets that have now wholly vanished. Most of the smiths lived in the country towns. Though salt was already dug from the Cheshire mines, the want of communication forced each district to supply itself as it could, and we find in Domesday between seventy and eighty salt-men along the Dorset coast, seemingly villeins, but paying such large rent as to prove their trade a profitable one. Fishers too were found along the coast, villeins like the salt-men, and like them paying dues to their lords.—Eyton, “Dorset Domesday,” pp. 50, 51.

the old faith and the adoption of the new, the planting of a Church on the soil with its ecclesiastical organization, its bishops, its priests, its court, and its councils, its language, its law, above all the new impulse given to political consolidation by the building up of Britain into a single religious communion. But these results of the new faith were small and unimportant beside the revolution which was wrought by it in individual life. From the cradle to the grave it had forced on the Englishman a new law of conduct, new habits, new conceptions of life and society. It entered above all into that sphere within which the individual will of the freeman had been till now supreme, the sphere of the home ; it curtailed his powers over child and wife and slave ; it forbade infanticide, the putting away of wives, or cruelty to the serf. It challenged almost every social conception ; it denied to the king his heritage of the blood of the gods ; it proclaimed slavery an evil, war an evil, manual labour a virtue. It met the feud face to face by denouncing revenge. It held up gluttony and drunkenness, the very essence of the old English "feast," as sins. It claimed to control every circumstance of life. It interfered with labour-customs by prohibitions of toil on Sundays and holy days. It forced on a rude community to which bodily joys were dear, long and painful fasts. Even profounder modifications were brought about by the changes

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CHAP. I. it wrought in the personal history of every Englishman. Ceremonialism hung round every one in those old days from the cradle to the grave, and by the contact with Christendom the whole character of English ceremonialism was altered. The very babe felt the change. Baptism succeeded the “dragging through the earth” for Hertha. A new kin was created for child and parents in the “gossip” of the christening. The next great act of life, marriage, remained an act done before and with assent of the fellow-villagers ; but new bonds of affinity limited a man’s choice ; and while the old hand-plighting and wed survived the priest’s blessing was added. The burial-rite was as completely altered. The burial-fire was abolished ; and instead of resting beneath his mound, like Beowulf, on some wind-swept headland or hill, the Christian warrior slept with his fellows in his lowly grave beneath the shade of the village church.

**Its strife
with
Heathen-
ism.**

But if the old faith was beaten by the new it was long in being killed. A hundred years after the conversion of Kent, King Wihtred had still to forbid Kentish-men “offering to devils.”¹ At the very close of the eighth century synods in Mercia and Northumbria were struggling against the heathen practice of eating horse-flesh² at the

¹ Thorpe, “Anc. Laws,” i. 41.

² Confess. Ecgberti, Thorpe, “Anc. Laws,” ii. 163. Haddan and Stubbs, “Councils,” iii. 459.

feast to Woden. In spite of this resistance however, Wodenism was so completely vanquished that even the coming of the Danes failed to revive it. The Christian priest had no longer to struggle against the worship of Thunder or of Frigga. But the far older nature-worship, the rude fetishism which dated back to ages long before history, had tougher and deeper roots. The new religion could turn the nature-deities of this primæval superstition into devils, its spells into magic, its spae-wives into witches, but it could never banish them from the imagination of men ; it had in the end even to capitulate to the nature-worship, to adopt its stones and its wells, to turn its spells into exorcisms and benedictions, its charms into prayers. How persistent was the strength of the older belief we see even at a later time than we have reached. "If witches or diviners," says Eadward, "perjurors or morth-workers, or foul, defiled, notorious adulteresses be found anywhere within the land, let them be driven from the country and the people cleansed, or let them wholly perish within the country."¹ Æthelstan, Eadmund, and Æthelred,² are as vigorous in their enactments ; and the Church Councils were fierce in their denunciations of these lower superstitions. "We earnestly forbid all heathendom," says a canon of Cnut's day.

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Ecgberht.¹ Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 173.² *Ibid.* i. 203, 247, 317.

CHAP. I. “Heathendom is that men worship idols ; that is, that they worship heathen gods, and the sun or the moon, fire or rivers, water-wells or stones, or great trees of any kind ; or that they love witchcraft or promote ‘morth-work’ in any wise, or by ‘blot’ or by ‘fyrht,’ or do anything of like illusions.”¹ “If witches or diviners, morth-workers or adulteresses, be anywhere found in the land, let them be diligently driven out of the country, or let them wholly perish in the country, save that they cease and amend.”² The effort of the kings and the Church was far from limiting itself to words. In the tenth century we hear of the first instance of a death in England for heresy, in the actual drowning of a witch-wife at London Bridge.³

Survival of heathen customs. But against many a heathen usage even Councils did not struggle. Easter-fires, May-day-fires, Midsummer-fires, with their numerous ceremonies, the rubbing the sacred flame,⁴ the running through the glowing embers, the throwing flowers on the fire, the baking in it and distributing large loaves and cakes, with the round dance about it, remained village-customs. At Christmas the entry of the boar’s head, decked with laurel and rosemary, recalled the sacrifice of the boar to Frigga at the Midwinter feast of the old heathendom. The

¹ Laws of Cnut. Thorpe, “Anc. Laws,” i. 379.

² *Ibid.*

³ Cod. Dip. 591.

⁴ Kemble, “Sax. in England,” i. 360.

Autumn-Feast lingered on unchallenged in the village harvest-home with the sheaf, in old times a symbol of the god, nodding gay with flowers and ribbons on the last waggon. As the ploughman took to his plough he still chanted the prayer that, though christened as it were by the new faith, remained in substance a cry to the Earth-Goddess of the old, "Earth, Earth, Earth, Mother Earth, grant thee the Almighty One, grant thee the Lord, acres waxing, and sprouts wantoning . . . and the broad crops of barley, and the white wheat-crop, and all crops of earth." So as he drove the first furrow he sang again, "Hail, Mother Earth, thou feeder of folk, be thou growing by goodness of God, filled with fodder, the folk to feed."¹

But if Christianity failed in winning a complete victory in this strife with the primæval religion which the tradition of ages had almost made a part of human thought and feeling, its outer victory over individual and social life was unquestioned. One of its momentous results was the intrusion into the social system of a new class, that of the clergy. The shorn head had its own social rights. Bishop, priest, lesser clerk, had each his legal "wer" as well as king, thegn, ceorl. The churchmen formed a distinct element in the state, an element to which in numbers, wealth, influence, jurisdiction, character, nothing analogous existed

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¹ Cockayne, "Saxon Leechdoms, etc., vol. i. pp. 402-405.

CHAP. I. in the older English society ; a class with its own organization, rule, laws, discipline, carefully defined by written documents in face of a world where all was yet vague, fluctuating, traditional. But this class had hardly taken its place in English society when influences from without and from within began to modify its relation to the general body of the state ; and yet more radical modifications were brought about by the Danish wars. The very character of the Church was changed. English Christianity had in its earlier days been specially monastic. But the development of the country was fast changing the relation of monasticism to its religious needs. The earlier monasteries had been practically mission-stations—centres from which preachers went out to convert the country, and from which after its conversion priests were still sent about to conduct its worship. But as the country became Christian the place of these missionaries was taken by the parish priest. The influence of the unmonastic clergy, the seculars as they were termed, superseded that of the regulars. It was not by monasteries but by its parochial organization that the Church was henceforth to penetrate into the very heart of English society.

The Growth
of the
parish.

It was only by slow degrees that the parish, or kirkshire as it was then called, attained a settled form. The three classes of churches which we find noted in the laws mark so many stages in the religious annexation of the land. The minster,

or mother church, which levied dues over wide tracts¹ recalled the earlier days when the Church still had an exclusively monastic form, and its preachers went forth from monastic centres to evangelize the country. The next stage was represented by the manorial church, the establishment within this wide area by lord after lord of churches on their own estates² for the service of their dependants, the extent of whose spiritual jurisdiction was at first coincident with that of the estate itself. A third class of small churches without burial-grounds represented the growing demands of popular religion. From Baeda's letter to Archbishop Ecgberht we see that the establishment of manorial churches, that is, of what we commonly mean by a parochial system, was still far from complete, at least in Northumbria, in the middle of the eighth century; but in the half century that followed, it had probably extended itself fairly over the land. An attempt was also made to provide a settled livelihood for the parish priests in the "tithe" or payment of a tenth of the farm-produce by their parishioners;³ but the obligation to pay this was still only imperfectly recognized, and the repeated injunctions of kings and synods

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¹ Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 263, 265; Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. 262.

² See Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 191, 263.

³ "A tithe of young by Pentecost, and of earth-fruits by All Hallows mass," Laws of Æthelred. Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 319. See Laws of Eadward and Guthrum, *ib.* p. 171.

CHAP. I. from Æthelstan downwards witness, by their repetition, to the general disobedience. It is probable that the priest as yet relied far more for his subsistence on his dues, on the “plough-alms” after Easter, the “church-shot” at Martinmas, and “light-shot” thrice in the year, as well as the “soul-shot” that was paid at the open grave.

The England of Egberht.
The parish and the township.

Nothing is more remarkable in this extension of the ecclesiastical system than the changes wrought by it in the original unit of English social life. The stages by which the township passed into its modern form of the parish, and by which almost every trace of its civil life successively disappeared, are obscure and hard to follow, but the change began with the first entry of the Christian priest into the township.¹ The village church seems often to have been built on the very mound that had served till then for the gatherings of the tun-folk. It is through this that we so often find in later days the tun-moot held in the churchyard or ground about the church, and the common practice even now of the farmers gathering for conference outside the church porch before morning service may preserve a memory of this freer open-air life of the moot before it became merged in the parish vestry. The church thus became the centre of village-life; it was at the church-door as in the moot, that “banns” were proclaimed, marriages or bargains made; even the “fair,” or market, was

¹ Stubbs, “Const. Hist.” i. 96, 104, 260.

held in the church-yard, and the village-feast, an institution no doubt of immemorial antiquity, was held on the day of the saint to which the church was dedicated; while the priest himself as its custodian, displaced more and more the tun-reeve or elder. It was he who preserved the weights and measures of the little community,¹ who headed the “beating” of its bounds, who administered its oaths and ordeals,² who led its four chosen men to hundred-moot or folk-moot, and sometimes even to the field. The revolution which was transforming the free township into the manor of a lord aided in giving the priest a public position. Though the lord’s court came to absorb the bulk of the work of the older tun-moot, the regulation and apportionment of the land, the enforcement of by-laws, the business of its police, yet the tun-moot retained the little that grant or custom had not stripped from it; and it is thus that, in its election of village officers, of churchwarden and waywarden, as well as in its exercise of the right of taxation within the township for the support of church and poor, we are enabled to recognize in the parish vestry with the priest at its head the survival of the village-moot which had been the nucleus of our early life.³

Without, the new faith brought England for pilgrimages, the first time, as we have seen, into religious con-

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¹ Lingard, “Anglo-Saxon Church,” i. 171.

² *Ibid.* ii. 132 *et seq.* ³ Stubbs, “Const. Hist.” i. 104.

CHAP. I. tact with the western world through the mission-work of Boniface and his followers in Germany, and into political contact with it through the relations which this mission-work established with the Empire of the Franks. But a social contact of a far closer and more national kind was brought about by the growth of pilgrimages. At the time which we have reached, pilgrimages were among the leading features of English life. The spell which the mere name of Rome had thrown over Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop had only wrought the more widely as years went on. From churchman it passed to layman, and the enthusiasm reached its height when English kings laid down their crowns to become suppliants at the shrine of the apostles. Fresh from his slaughter of the Jutes in the Isle of Wight, the West-Saxon Ceadwalla "went to Rome, being desirous to obtain the peculiar honour of being washed in the font of baptism within the church of the blessed apostles, for he had learned that in baptism alone the entrance of heaven is opened to mankind, and he hoped that laying down his flesh as soon as he was baptized, he being cleansed, should immediately pass to the eternal joys of heaven. Both which things came to pass as he had conceived them in his mind. For coming to Rome," in 689, "he was baptized on the holy Saturday before Easter Day, and being still in his white garment he fell sick, was freed from the flesh," on the 20th of April,

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“and was associated with the blessed in heaven.”¹ Twenty years later a king of the Mercians and a king of the East Saxons quitted their thrones to take the tonsure at Rome,² and in 725 even Ine of Wessex gave up the strife with the anarchy about him, and made his way to die amidst the sacred memories of the holy city.

The pilgrimages of the kings gave a new energy to the movement, and from this time the pilgrims' way was thronged by groups of English folk, “noble and ceorl, layman and clerk, men and women.”³ The dangers and hardships of the journey failed to deter them. The road which the pilgrims followed was mainly the same by which English travellers nowadays reach Italy; they landed at Quentavic near Boulogne, which was then the chief port of the northern coast of Gaul, and crossing the high grounds of Burgundy at Langres⁴ journeyed along the Saone valley and Savoy to the passes of Mount Cenis. It was in these Alpine districts that the troubles of the pilgrims reached their height; for if an Archbishop of Canterbury could be frozen to death in traversing them⁵ we may conjecture how severe must have been the sufferings of poorer travellers; but

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Their
dangers.

¹ Bæd. H. E. lib. v. c. 7.

² *Ibid.* lib. v. c. 19.

³ Bæd. H. E. lib. v. c. 7, “Quod his temporibus plures de gente Anglorum, nobiles, ignobiles, laici, clerici, viri et feminae, certatim facere consuerunt.”

⁴ Beda, “Lives of Abbots of Wearmouth,” sec. 21.

⁵ Will. Malm. “Gest. Pontiff.” (Opera, ed. Migne, col. 1453).

CHAP. I. to the natural hardships of the journey was added the hostility of their fellow-men. To the robber lords of the mountain valleys pilgrims were a natural prey. It was in vain that Offa and Cnut alike sought protection for their subjects from Charles the Great and the Emperor Conrad. Imperial edicts told little on the greed of these hungry mountain wolves ; an archbishop was plundered in Cnut's own day ; and soon after the marauders were lucky enough to pillage three bishops as well.¹ It was in vain that the wayfarers gathered into companies for mutual protection ;² for the country with its defiles and precipices was itself on the side of their assailants, and in the opening of the tenth century we hear of the surprise and slaughter of two bodies of English pilgrims in the mountains.

Their popularity. But neither the dangers of the journey nor the fever that awaited them at its close checked the rush of pilgrims.³ The increase in number indeed had been accompanied by a falling off in the character of the travellers. In some cases the exemption from port-dues which was granted to pilgrims seems to have been used as a cover for smuggling ; while the custom of enforcing a visit

¹ *Angl. Sacr.* ii. 129.

² We find eighty Englishmen in the train of Abbot Ceolfrid of Wearmouth.—*Baeda, "Lives of Abbots of Wearmouth,"* sec. 21.

³ "Magna febris fatigatio advenas illic venientes visitare seu gravare solet."—*Life of St. Winibald, ap. Canis,* p. 126, quoted by Lingard, "Anglo-Saxon Church," ii. 127.

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to the shrine of St. Peter as a penance for ecclesiastical crimes must have introduced a criminal element into the pilgrim companies. The association was the easier as the unshorn hair and beard which the law imposed on the "banished" man was also the customary mark of the pilgrim. Poverty too told hardly on the virtue of the women devotees; and Boniface, with a touch of priestly exaggeration, protests that by the middle of the eighth century Englishwomen of evil life could be found in every city in Lombardy.¹ But the religious impulse never ceased to supply worthier pilgrims than these; there was indeed so constant a stream of Englishmen traversing Rome from shrine to shrine, listening to its wild legends, gathering relics, books, gold-work, and embroidery, that it was necessary by Offa's day to found a distinct quarter of the town, called the "Saxon School," for their reception and shelter.

It would be hard to trace out the multifold forms in which the new religion impressed itself upon the social and political organization of the people whom it had won. We have already seen the influence which it exerted on the intellectual development of the country, but if the art of writing, as the missionaries introduced it, made a revolution in our literature, it made an even greater revolution in our law. Law, as all early tribes understood it, was simply the custom of

^{written and unwritten} law.

¹ Lett. Bonif. (ed. Giles), lxiii. p. 146; cf. xlvi. p. 104.

CHAP. I. each separate people as uttered from memory by its "law-man," under check of his assessors and of the gathered folk. Such utterances were looked on as changeless and divine. The authority of the past was in fact unquestioned; the people itself was conscious of no power to change the customs of its fathers; and it was only by an unconscious adaptation to the varying circumstances of each generation that this oral law was ceaselessly modified. But with the writing down of these customs the whole conception of law was changed. Not only was its sacred character, as well as the mystery which veiled its sources in the memory of the law-man, taken from it, but the mere writing them down fixed and hardened the customs themselves and took from them their power of adaptation and self-development; for change in the laws could henceforth only be wrought consciously, and on grounds of reason or necessity which questioned or set aside the authority they drew from the past.

**Early
English
codes**

What caused this revolution to be so little felt was the slowness with which it was wrought. Great as was the fame of Æthelberht's code among scholars like Baeda, it was long before the rival states followed the example of Kent. There is nothing to warrant us in believing that written law reached Wessex before Ine, or Mercia before Offa, or that it ever reached Northumbria at all. The sphere, too, of the written code remained a

narrow and partial one ; it restricted itself for the most part to such customs as were affected by the new moral conceptions which Christianity brought in and the new social order it created, or to the changes in police or in land-tenure which sprang from the natural advance of population and wealth.¹ Æthelberht's laws are little more than a record of the customary fines for penal offences, with a provision for the legal status of the new Christian priesthood,² and in the Kentish codes that follow, it is mainly on the ecclesiastical side that the area of legislation is widened.³ Ine found himself forced by the advance of industry and by a new state of public order to deal largely with the subjects of agriculture and police,⁴ while

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¹ The earliest codes we possess are those of Kent, the laws of Æthelberht (ab. 600), those of Hlothere and Eadric (673-685), and those of Wiþræd (ab. 690). Ine's laws (676-705) are our only West-Saxon code. The Mercian code of Offa (755-794), though used by Ælfred in his compilation, is now lost.

² Out of ninety clauses, forty-one fix the fines for injury to various parts of the body. Almost all the laws refer to violent attacks on person or property : there is no mention of trade or agriculture. The Church is mentioned in the first provision alone.

³ The Church is not mentioned in Hlothere and Eadric's laws, of whose sixteen provisions about half are fines for violence, the rest being for the most part regulations as to plaints in a suit, chapmen, and man-stealing ; but those of Wiþræd are almost wholly ecclesiastical.

⁴ A fourth of Ine's laws are concerned with agriculture in some way or other, such as the fencing of lands, protection of woods, cattle-stealing and maiming, trespass, firing of fences, etc. Few relate to acts of violence, but nearly a quarter of the whole code is concerned with theft, while the subject of trade comes for the first time prominently forward. Legal procedure again is largely treated. Under internal police we

CHAP. I. fresh provisions were needed to regulate the position of the Welsh who had submitted to his sword ; but in other ways the bounds of his legislation are as narrow as those of the Kentish code, nor, so far as we can gather from *Ælfred's compilation*, were those of Offa any wider. To the last, indeed, the whole of our family law, with the bulk of our village and of our land law, remained purely oral.

Early English jurisprudence. The new moral ideas which were generated alike by Christianity and by the settlement of the community itself in more peaceful and industrious form told with equal force on English jurisprudence. A glance at the early history of our national justice shows that its original groundwork was the right of feud. Older than "the peace of the folk," far older than "the king's peace," which was to succeed it, was the "frith" or peace of the freeman himself, the right that each man had to secure for himself safe life and sound limb. He lay, as the phrase ran then, "in his own hand."¹ It was his right to fight his foe, his

may place the provisions for determining the relations of a man with his lord, for regulating the quitting of lands, and the like. The laws against mutilation of cattle, no doubt records of early custom, are really directed against damage done to what was the general medium of exchange, for a mutilated beast was useless for purposes of barter.

¹ "Mund" or "hand" meant the protection conferred by any one and the peace consequent on it, and "mund-bryce," or "hand-breach," was the violent breaking in on this peace and the sum paid as atonement for such a "breach of the peace."—"Essays in Anglo-Saxon Law" (Boston), p. 279.

right and even his duty personally to exact vengeance for wrong done to him; and his kinsmen were bound by their tie of blood to aid him alike in self-defence and in revenge. Traces of this older state of things, in which every freeman was his own absolute guardian and avenger, ran through the whole structure of our later jurisprudence and procedure. A man might slay one whom he found in his own house within closed doors with his wife, or daughter, or sister, or mother;¹ he might slay the thief whom he caught red-handed in the actual commission of his theft,² or the accused man who would not come in peacefully to make answer to the charge.³ But as a general right, that of unregulated vengeance had long passed away before Saxon or Engle reached Britain. The conquerors came as "folks"; and the very existence of a folk implied a "folk-frith" of the community as a whole. Every man of the folk lay in "the folk's hand"; and, wrongdoer as he might be, it was only when the "hand" was opened, and its protection withdrawn, that the folk could suffer him to be

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Even in later days we may note that before paying the "wite," or fine for the breach of the "folk-peace," a culprit has to pay the bôt, or atonement to the wronged man for the breach of his own peace.

¹ *Ll. Aelfred*, 4. *Thorpe*, "Anc. Laws," i. 91.

² *Ll. Ine*, 12, 16, 21, 28, 35. *Thorpe*, "Anc. Laws," i. 111. 125.

³ *Ll. Eadw. and Guthr.* 6. *Thorpe*, "Anc. Laws," i. 171.

CHAP. I. maimed or slain.¹ The earliest conception therefore of public justice was a solemn waiver on the part of the community of its right and duty of protection in the case of one who had wronged his fellow member of the folk. Till such a waiver was given the wrongdoer remained in the folk's "mund"; and to act against him without such a waiver or without appeal to the folk was to act against the folk itself, for it was a breach of the peace or frith to which his "mund" entitled him. It was the demand for such a withdrawal of the public protection that constituted the trial, and the folk were the only judges of the demand. Thrice, and before good witness, had the summons to the folk-moot or court to be given by the accuser to the man he charged with the crime, and that at his own house, at the sunsetting, and seven days before the moot. Refusal thrice repeated on the part of the accused to hearken to the summons to make answer in the folk-moot, or to submit to its doom, was a contempt of the folk; but only after threefold refusal was the folk's "mund" withdrawn from him; till then the wronged man who sought his own vengeance for the wrong broke the folk-frith and became a wrongdoer in his turn.

¹ "It was a fundamental rule of German law that vengeance must be authorised by previous permission of the Court, or if it preceded the judgment, it must afterwards be justified before the tribunal."—"Essays in Angl. Sax. Law," p. 264.

It was thus that folk-moot and hundred-moot assumed a judicial character. Originally they were no courts of justice in the modern sense of the word; they did not decide on the truth or falsehood of the charge made, still less did they assign a punishment for wrong done. The wrong was still between man and man; its punishment, if punished it was, must be exacted by the wronged man or his kinsfolk from the wrong-doer by sheer fighting; but ere the fight could begin the leave of the folk at large had to be sought and given. The license ran in words long preserved in English law, "homini liceat pugnare," "you may fight."¹ But before such a license could be procured, it was needful that the folk should decide that the man had a right to fight; and the accused thus found himself fronted by the oath,² the solemn appeal to heaven. It may be that here again men looked on their fellow-men as being in the "mund," not only of the folk, but in a higher sense of the gods they served, and that, as the appearance of the accuser before the moot was a seeking for the discharge of the wrong-doer from the protection of the folk, so the oath was a seeking for his discharge from the protection of his heavenly lord and guardian. But whether such a conception, or more dim and vague

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Egberht.
The feud and
the folk.

¹ *Ælfred*, 42. Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," p. 91.

² See the collection of oaths in Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," vol. i. 179-185.

CHAP. I. ideas of awe and dread, as of a vengeance of the gods on men who wronged them by falsehood, gave birth to the oath, it was the soul of the judicial process before the folk-moot. By a fore-oath the accuser stated his charge against the accused ;¹ and if the accused met oath with oath the appeal was complete. With the truth or falsehood of the charge the folk had nothing to do : what it had to do was to judge whether the charge was of such a sort, and made in such a way, as to give the accuser fair ground for seeking amends from the accused. If such was its judgment, the folk withdrew its "mund," and suffered the two contending parties to wage their war.

The bounds of the feud. But its jurisdiction was not yet exhausted. As a people interested in its own peace and order, the folk had still the right as it had the power to determine how this war should be waged. Even in the earliest days custom had thrown its bonds round the wild right of private war. It had forbidden all secret vengeance, such as poisoning, all mutilation or cold-blooded cruelty, all concealment of the deed. Though in vengeance or self-defence a man might slay his foe if he met him, yet "If a man slay another man in revenge or self-defence," ran a law which, late as the date of its embodiment in writing may be, is clearly a record of primæval usage, "let him take to himself none of the goods

¹ He might show, without oath, the wound with which he charged him, and this stood in place of the oath.

of the dead, neither his horse, nor helmet, nor shield, nor any money, but in wonted manner let him arrange the body of the dead man, his head to the west, his feet to the east, upon his shield, if he have it ; and let him drive deep his lance, and hang there his arms, and to it rein in the dead man's steed ; and let him go the nearest vill and declare his deed to the first man he meets, that he may make proof and have defence against the kindred and friends of the man he has slain."¹ The same web of custom threw itself round the wider warfare of the kin. As late as the days of *Ælfred*² we see the kindred of the slain man gathered, their quick secret ride over the country, the foe's house surrounded and besieged ; but not for seven days, ran law or custom, must attack be made, for seven days the vengeance-seeker and his kinsfolk must watch the house, while the wrong-doer within takes counsel with them of his household whether to surrender or to fight. If within these days he chose to surrender, for thirty days more they lay about the house, while the wrong-doer sent about his friends and kinsmen to find men who would aid him in the atonement for his crime,³ and it was not till these were gathered that taking one of his house as a spokesman he gave him pledge that he would make full atone-

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Egberht.¹ Hen. I. 83, sec. 6. Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 591.² Ll. *Ælfred*, 42. Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 91.³ Ll. *Eadmund*, ii. 7. Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 251. *

CHAP. I. **The** **England of** **Egberht.** ment, and with this pledge the spokesman came forth to the kindred of the slain. Again in their turn these gave pledge that the slayer might draw near in peace and himself give pledge for the "wer," or atonement for his crime. It was only when he stood before them and gave his free pledge for this payment, and strengthened it by giving security for its completion, that the feud was at an end.

Eadmund's **reforms.** With all these bounds and limitations, however, the feud became more and more incompatible with the growing sense of humanity and public order. "Both I and all of us," said Eadmund in a proclamation to his people,¹ "hold in horror the unrighteous and manifold fightings that exist among ourselves." It jarred too with the conception of personal responsibility that Christianity had introduced, and which was deepening as the bonds of kinship grew weaker with the progress of society. Eadmund's law, indeed, struck a heavy blow at the very principle of kinship:—"If henceforth any man slay another, let him bear the feud himself (save that by the aid of his friends and within twelve months he make amends with the full wer), to be borne as he may. If his kinsmen forsake him and will not pay for him, it is my will that all the kindred be out of feud, save the actual doer of the deed, provided that they do not give him either food or protection. . . . Moreover,

¹ *Ll. Eadmund.* Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 246.

if any of the other man's kinsmen take vengeance upon any man save the actual doer of the deed, let him be foe to the king and all his friends and forfeit all that he has."¹ It was only slowly that so great a change in custom and feeling as this law implies could be actually brought about, and the feud still remained, however hampered by reforms, the base of our criminal procedure ; but its enactment shows that the change had begun, and that two conceptions from whose union our modern justice was to spring, the conception of personal responsibility for crime, and the conception of crime as committed primarily not against the individual but against the public peace, were from this time to exercise a deepening influence on national sentiment.

In the reforms of Eadmund, however, we have passed long beyond the jurisprudence of the time of Ecgberht. At the opening of the ninth century English thought was still far from our modern conceptions of justice or law, from the conception of crime as committed primarily against the public peace, as cognizable only by public authority, and as corrected by public punishment. As yet, and for centuries to come, all that either king or community attempted to do was to bring the right of private vengeance and self-protection within definite and customary bounds, to subject it to the previous sanction and permission of the folk in the folk-moot, to provide means for averting it

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England of
Ecgberht.The "folk's
justice."

¹ *Ll. Eadmund.* Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 249.

CHAP. I. where no good grounds existed for its exercise by solemn oath or ordeal of innocence on the part of the accused, or where such grounds really existed to provide and extend the sphere of a fixed and customary atonement in place of actual blood-shedding. Scant, however, as such a justice may seem to modern eyes, it would have been practically effective for the purposes of public order had any adequate machinery existed for imposing the will of the folk on accuser and accused. But the folk-moot had no direct means of enforcing its doom. If a man thrice refused, after due summons, to appear before it, or appeared but refused to bow to its decision, he put himself indeed by his very act out of the folk, and out of its protection ; he became, in a word, an "outlaw," who might be hunted down like a wolf, and knocked on the head by any man who met him.¹ But beyond this general hostility the folk had no means of forcing such an offender to submit to its judgment. A yet weightier obstacle to efficient justice was often found in the course of procedure itself. Accuser and accused brought kinsmen and friends in their train to the folk-moot, whether to sway its doom or to enforce it, or to guard against vengeance without law. With such a crowd of adherents at the moot, it must always have been hard for meaner men to get justice against king's thegn or country thegn, and as the nobles rose to

¹ "Ess. in Ang-Sax. Law," 271, 275, 283.

a new height above the people, it was easy for them to hold hundred-moot and even folk-moot at bay. Kent was among the most civilized and orderly parts of England, but at an even later time than this we find the great men of Kent setting the doom of its folk-moot absolutely at defiance.¹

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It was this difficulty more than all else that must have led to the passing of the "folk's justice" into "the justice of the king." From the earliest days the king had been recognized not only as a political and military leader, but as a judge; and he was the one judge whose position gave him the power of enforcing his dooms, for by himself or by his ealdorman the whole military strength of the kingdom or shire could be called out to bring a culprit to submission. It was natural that as the local courts found themselves more and more helpless against the great lords they should appeal to a force before which the greatest lords must bow; and that the baffled Witan of Kent should pray Æthelstan that, "if any man be so rich or of so great kin that he cannot be punished or will not cease from his wrong-doing, you may settle how he may be carried away into some other part of your kingdom, be the case whose it may, whether of villein or thegn."² The extension, too, of thegnhood, and the growth of private jurisdictions

¹ Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 217.

² *Ibid.*

CHAP. I. or sookes, exempt from the common jurisdiction of the hundred-moot, gave a new scope to the justice of the king.¹ As such private jurisdictions grew more and more frequent, they not only weakened the older justice of the people, but forced on the royal court a large development of its judicial activity, if the justice of the lords was to be hindered from passing into a means of extortion and tyranny.

The king's court. Such a development was made easy by the very character of the king's court. The English king was a great landowner, and like other great landowners he was driven from one "vill" to another for actual subsistence. He was in constant motion, for payments were made in kind, and it was only by moving from manor to manor that he could eat up his rents. A Northumbrian king had to consume his customary dues in one vill at the foot of the Cheviots and in another on the Don. A king of Wessex had no other means of gathering his rents from his demesne on the Exe or on the Thames. The king's court therefore was really a moving body, a little army eating its way from demesne to demesne, but with a home in our modern sense nowhere, encamping at one or another spot only for so long as the rent-in-kind sufficed, and then after a day or two rolling

¹ Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. 214, etc. "It is probable that, except in a few special cases, the sac and soc thus granted were before the Conquest exemptions from the hundred courts only, and not from those of the shire."

onward. In the stories of the time¹ we see the king's forerunners pushing ahead of the train, arriving in haste at the spot destined for the next halt, broaching the beer-barrels, setting the board, slaying and cooking the kine, baking the bread ; till the long company come pounding in through the muddy roads, horsemen and spearmen, thegn and noble, bishop and clerk, the string of sumpter horses, the big waggons with the royal hoard or the royal wardrobe, and at last the heavy standard borne before the king himself. Then follows the rough justice-court, the hasty council, the huge banquet, the fires dying down into the darkness of the night, till a fresh dawn wakes the forerunners to seek a fresh encampment.

Such was in greater or less degree the life of every great noble, and such necessarily was that of the king. But with the growing consolidation of England into a single realm these movements took a more ceremonious and political form. Custom came to regulate the seeming disorder of the royal progress ; each manor, each town, knows and makes its customary payments in kind, thegn and villein render their customary service, while the royal clerk reads from the custom-roll and ticks off the dues paid and the service done. "Watching the king," in fact, finding horses for

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The court
on progress.

¹ See for Ine, Will. Malmesbury, "Gest. Reg." (Hardy), vol. i. p. 49 ; for Æthelstan, the Saxon Life of Dunstan (Memorials of Dunstan, pp. 17, 18).

CHAP. I. his journey, or boats for his sail, guarding his person, supplying his larder, become the customary tenures by which towns hold their freedom. The progresses grow regular and methodical ; men know when their king will be among them, they know where to bring their suit, their plea, their gift to him. As the king moves through forest and waste, his progress is a chase ; he finds his foresters in waiting with the villeins bound to customary service in driving the deer. As he passes over the "king's highway," landlord and thegn are called to give account for broken road or broken bridge. In his rough justice-court there is the appeal to be heard, the false moneyer to be branded, the outlaw to be hanged at the nearest oak. The "king's peace" is about him as he goes ; his "grith," the breach of which no fine can atone for,¹ spreads for a given space around his court : a double "bôt" and fine protects all who are on their way to him ; if a brawler fight over his cups in the king's hall, he may die at the king's will.² The court itself is no longer the mere train of personal attendants which followed a provincial king ; it is a little army that needs its officers to order and marshal it, its chamberlain to command the household to deck the rough halls with courtly hangings for the king's stay, to issue from the hoard the gold drinking-cups for the

¹ *Æthelr.* iii. Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 293.

² *Ine*, sec. 6. Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 107.

king's table, to pay and command the bodyguard ; its staller to order its movements, to direct the horses, the sumpter mules, the long string of waggons, as well as to "park" the vast encampment for the night ; its dish-thegn and cup-thegn to provide the beeves and bread, the wines and ale, for its daily consumption. The creation of these great officers of the household, some of whom we find already existing in *Ælfred's* time, was one of the most important results of the royal progresses. But a yet more important result was the impulse they gave to the change in our system of justice, for at a time when the public needs called for a judicial power which should be strong enough to enforce its doom upon noble and churl, and supreme alike over folk-moot and soke, the progresses of the king carried such a power into every corner of the realm.

The development however of English justice was but one of the influences that were telling throughout the period on the transformation of the English kingship. As England drew together into its Three Kingdoms the wider dominion of the king removed him further and further from his people, lifting him higher and higher above the nobles, and clothing him more and more with a mysterious dignity. Every reign raised the sovereign in the social scale. The bishop, once ranked equal with him in value of life, sank to the level of the ealdorman. The ealdorman him-

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Growth of
the king-
ship.

CHAP. I. self, in earlier days the hereditary ruler of a smaller state, became a mere delegate of the king. The king, if he was no longer sacred as the son of Woden, became yet more sacred as “the Lord’s Anointed.” By the very fact of his consecration he was pledged to a religious rule, to justice, mercy and good government ; but his “hallowing” invested him also with a power drawn not from the will of man or the assent of his subjects but from the will of God. Treason against him thus became the worst of crimes, while personal service at his court was held not to degrade but to enoble. The thegns of his household found themselves officers of state ; and the development of politics, the wider extension of home and foreign affairs, gradually transformed these royal servants into a standing council of ministry for the transaction of the ordinary administrative business, and the reception of judicial appeals.

*The ætheling and the
thegen.*

The rise of the royal power was furthered by the change which passed at this time over the character of the English noble. Not only was the character of this class profoundly affected by the consolidation of the smaller folks into larger realms, but its whole relation to the king was radically changed. The superiority of the ætheling over the ceorl was a traditional superiority which reached back to the very infancy of the race, and which consisted in an actual difference, as both believed, of blood and origin. The tribal

king was simply the noblest among the æthelings. But with the extinction of the smaller kingships, and the subjection of both classes to one of the greater monarchies, the position of the hereditary noble was changed. He was no longer of the same blood with the king ; while the wider area of the state, and the number of æthelings it necessarily included within it, lowered his individual position and brought him nearer to the ceorl. At the same time he was being displaced from his older position by nobles of a new and distinct class. Service with the kings, as we have seen, begot the class of thegns ; and while the hereditary noble dwindled with the growth of kingship, the noble by service necessarily rose with it. An ætheling of the Middle English inevitably grew less and less important as the Mercian kingdom widened its bounds from sea to sea, while a thegn of the Mercian court grew as inevitably greater. And to the greatness that came of his relation to a greater master the thegn added a corresponding superiority of wealth. The possessions of the village noble might lift him above his fellow villager, but they could not vie with the wide domains which the kings of the great states carved out of the folk-land for their thegns.¹ The æthelings thus died down into a social class, while the

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¹ These grants had become so frequent, that even by Ine's time, though some gesiths remained landless, this was exceptional.—Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. 181, note 3.

CHAP. I. thegns took their place as a political nobility dependent on the crown.

**The
England of
Ecgberht.**

A further development of the royal power sprang from the changes wrought in the older national institutions by the disappearance of the tribal kingships in the larger monarchies of the Three Kingdoms. The life of the earlier English state was gathered up in its folk-moot. There through its representatives, chosen in every hundred-moot, the folk expressed and exercised its own sovereignty in matters of justice, as of peace and war. But when the folk sank into a portion of a wider state, its folk-moot sank with it ; if it still met, it was only to exercise one of its older functions, that of supreme justice-court, while political supremacy passed from it to the court of the far-off lord.¹ And as the folk-moot died down into the later shire-moot or county-court, the folk's influence on government came to an end. Folk-moots of Surrey-men or South Saxons could exercise no control over a king of Wessex. Folk-moots of Hwiccas or North Engle could bring no check to bear on a king of Mercia. Nor was the loss of this influence made up by the control of the nobler class. Beside the folk-moot, and acting with it, had stood the Witenagemot, the group of æthelings gathered to give rede to the king, and through him to propose a course of action to the folk. On these the growth of the monarchies did

¹ Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. 140, 141.

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not tell as directly as on the folk-moot. Nobles could still gather about the king; and while the folk-moot passes out of political notice, the Witenagemot is heard of more and more as a royal council. But if the name remained, the meeting itself became a wholly different one. The decline in the class of æthelings, their displacement by the thegn, would alone have altered its character. The distance of the king from the nobles' homes, as the lesser realms were gathered into the Three Kingdoms, altered it yet more. When a West-Saxon king called his Witan to Exeter he probably expected few thegns from Sussex or Kent. When he called them to Kent he can hardly have seen many from Cornwall or the Defn-sætan. From the opening of the age of consolidation, therefore, the Witenagemot naturally changed into a mere gathering of bishops and great ealdormen, as well as of the royal thegns in service at the court;¹ and it retained this form under the kings of a single England, with just such an increase of numbers as necessarily resulted from the welding of the three realms into one. The seventeen bishops of the English sees, about an equal number of ealdormen, whom we may again presume to be

¹ Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. 146. The Witenagemot that gathered round such a king as Offa consisted only of the five bishops of the Mercian kingdom, of the five or six ealdormen who may have ruled over the older kingdoms or folks that were included within it, and of some ten or a dozen thegns* who probably held high offices in the royal household.

CHAP. I. actual rulers of the various folks and under-kings-

^{The England of Egberht.} doms, a few abbots, and some fifty or sixty nobles and thegns, comprised the list at its fullest. But the usual gatherings hardly exceed in number those of Offa's court ; and even under later kings, such as Eadgar, the usual Witenagemots number some nine prelates, five ealdormen, and fifteen thegns.¹

^{Its character.} Such a council might in many ways reflect the national temper, but it was in no sense a representative of the nation. On occasions of peculiar solemnity indeed, such as that of a coronation or the promulgation of a code of laws, the old theory of a folk-moot ratifying the decisions of the Witan and the king rose again into life, and the retinues in the train of noble and prelate represented by their shouts of "Aye, aye," the assent of the collective freemen. But such an assent was a mere survival of the past ; in practice it was an empty form, and the occasions on which it was called for were rare and exceptional.² In ordinary times the Witenagemot was little more than a

¹ See for the whole of this subject, Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. cap. vi.

² The decisions of one of Æthelstan's Witenagemots are made in common with "totâ populi generalitate." — Cod. Dip. 364. But "that such gatherings shared in any way the constitutional powers of the Witan, that they were organized in any way corresponding to the machinery of the folk-moot, that they had any representative character in the modern sense as having full powers to act on behalf of constituents, that they shared the judicial work, or, except by applause and hooting, influenced the decisions of the chiefs, there is no evidence whatever." — Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. 142.

royal council, whose members were named and summoned by the king,¹ and which widened now and then into aristocratic assemblies that foreshadowed the "Great Council" of the later Baronage.

That the movement towards national consolidation should have stopped so long at the creation of the Three Kingdoms is one of the problems of our early history. But as the eighth century drew to its close, the internal conditions of these states and their relations to one another showed that the long-delayed revolution was near at hand. The most prominent cause of the break-up of the political system of the Three Kingdoms was one that had already told fatally on the lesser kingships. In the earlier life of the English peoples, political individuality found its centre and representative in their royal stocks; and the number of the separate folks was shown in the number of their kings. Kent and Sussex found room for at least two in each realm; East Anglia and Wessex seem at times to have had many; there were separate royal stocks for peoples like the Hecanas and Hwiccias, or the South-Mercians and Middle-Engle. It was only through the extinction or degradation of these kingly families that national union was possible; and it is as a main step in bringing this

CHAP. I.
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The
England of
Egberht.

The Three
Kingdoms.

¹ Æthelstan speaks of the Witan at his great meetings as "Witan whom the king himself has named."—Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 241.

CHAP. I. about that the formation of the larger states during

**The
England of
Egberht.** the seventh and eighth centuries is so important in our history. With the gradual extension of

the Three Kingdoms the bulk of the smaller kingships disappeared.¹ Some kings lingered on for a time as under-kings; some sank into ealdormen, who drew their power from the appointment of the conquering over-lord; some, no doubt, perished altogether with the chances of time and of war.² But a new period began from the moment that the extinction of the royal stocks told on the Three Kingdoms themselves.

**Northum-
bria.**

Northumbria was no longer the formidable kingdom which we have seen carrying its arms to the Clyde in the days of Eadberht. The withdrawal of that king to a cloister had been the close of its greatness, for after a year's reign his son Oswulf was slain by the thegns of his household,³ and with his death peace and order seem to have come utterly to an end. Oswulf was in fact the last undisputed representative of the royal line of Bernicia. The kingly house fell with him, and from this moment a strife for the

¹ Thus the Lindsey kings were extinct before 678, when their land was disputed between Mercia and Northumbria; nor do we hear of any Middle-English king after Peada. The stock of Deira ended with Oswini. The kings of Sussex are not heard of after its conquest by Egberht, nor those of Wight after its conquest by Ceadwalla.

² Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. 198, etc.

³ "Occisus . . . à suā familiā," Sim. Durh. "Gest. Reg." a. 758.

crown absorbed the whole energy of Northumbria. The throne was seized by *Æthelwold Moll*; ¹ and a victory over his opponents at the Eildon Hills near Melrose so strengthened his power that Offa, just settled in Mercia, gave him his daughter to wife. But after six years of rule *Æthelwold Moll* lost his kingdom in a fight at Winchanheale in 765; ² and his place was taken by another claimant, Alchred.³ The history of Northumbria became from this hour a mere strife between these rivals and their houses. Alchred, victorious over two risings under ealdormen,⁴ was driven in 774 to take refuge among the Picts by *Æthelred*, the son of *Æthelwold*; but after four years of strife *Æthelred* followed his rival into exile; and his successor, Alfwold “the son of Oswulf” interrupts for nine years, from 779 to 788, the rule of the warring houses. Alfwold’s reign however was as stormy as the rest. In one rising an ealdorman was “burnt” by two of his fellow-ealdormen; and in 788 another ealdorman rose and slew the king.⁵ With his slaying the two houses again came to the front; for two years Alchred’s son, Osred, occupied the throne; and on his flight⁶ in face of a revolt of his ealdormen, the son of *Æthelwold Moll*,

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¹ Sim. Durh. “Gest. Reg.” a. 759.

² *Ibid.* 765.

³ Alchred claimed descent from Ida through Bleacmann.—Flor. Worc. a. 765; but Simeon adds “ut quidam dicunt.”—Gest. Reg. a. 765. *Æthelwold*’s descent was even more doubtful: “of uncertain descent.”

⁴ Sim. Durh. “Gest. Reg.” a. 774.

⁵ *Ibid.* 788.

⁶ *Ibid.* 792.

CHAP. I. **Æ**thelred, was again recalled to the kingdom after eleven years of exile.

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Alcuin. **Æ**thelred shrank from no blood-shedding to secure his throne. The two children of his predecessor were drawn by false oaths from their sanctuary at York to be slain at his bidding,¹ and Osred, who was drawn by like pledges from Man, found a like doom. For a while this ruthlessness seems to have succeeded in producing some sort of peace, but the long anarchy of thirty years had left the land a mere chaos of bloodshed and misrule, and all that saved it from utter ruin was the wide extension of its ecclesiastical domains. The waste and bloodshed of its civil wars stopped short at the bounds of the vast possessions which had been granted to its churches ; the privilege of sanctuary which they enjoyed gave shelter to the victims of the strife ; and the learning and culture of Bæda and of Archbishop Ecgberht still found untroubled homes at Jarrow or York. Its intellectual life was thus able to go on amidst the wreck of its political life ; and in the midst of the anarchy a scholar passed from the schools of Northumbria to become the literary centre of the west. Born about 735 within the walls of York, Alcuin had reached early manhood at the retirement of Eadberht from the throne.² He had

¹ Sim. Durh. "Gest. Reg." a. 792.

² For Alcuin, see article on him by Stubbs in "Dict. Christ. Biogr." vol. i. p. 73.

been entrusted, like other noble youths, to Archbishop Ecgberht in his boyhood ; and was placed under the schoolmaster Æthelberht, who followed Ecgberht in his see on his death. In 766, when Alchred had just mounted the throne, he seems to have accompanied Æthelberht on a journey to Rome, and some time after his return himself took charge of the school of York. The years of his teaching there, from 767 to 780, were the age of its greatest fame and influence ;¹ so strangely in fact was the Church isolated from the secular fortunes of the realm about it that amidst the growing anarchy of Northumbria not only scholars from every part of Britain, but even from Germany and Gaul, are said to have crowded to Alcuin's lecture-room, while his friend, Archbishop Æthelberht, was busy in building a new and more sumptuous church at York, as well as in journeys to Rome in which he could gather books for its library.

It was on his return from a journey to get the pallium for Æthelberht's successor in 781 that Alcuin, now the most famous of European scholars, met Charles the Great at Parma, and was drawn by him from his work in Britain to the wider work of spreading intellectual life among the Franks. But though his home was

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bria and the
Wikings.

¹ “Eo tempore in Eboraica civitate famosus merito scholam magister Alchuinus tenebat, undecumque ad se confluentibus de magna sua scientia communicans.”—Vit. S. Liudgeri, quoted by Lingard, “Anglo-Saxon Church,” vol. ii. p. 203.

CHAP. L now in a strange land, Alcuin's heart still clave to his own Northumbria. The news of its fresh disorder, and the slaying of Alfwold in 788, drew from him prayer after prayer to Charles for leave to revisit his country; and in 790, soon after the recall of Æthelred Moll to the throne, he seems to have returned to the north of Britain. If so, he must have witnessed the bloody deeds by which Æthelred strove to secure his crown; and we cannot wonder at his finding omens of ill in "that reign of blood which," as he wrote after his departure to the king, "we saw in Lent, at a time when the sky was calm and cloudless, fall from the lofty roof of the northern aisle of the church in York."¹ But he could hardly have dreamt how fatally the omen was to be fulfilled by the first descent of the northmen only a few months after his return to Gaul. Their incursion again roused civil strife. In the spring of 796 King Æthelred was slain, and whatever was now the connexion of the Northumbrian with the Frankish court, the wrath of Charles against a race whom he denounced as "murderers of their lords" was hardly allayed by Alcuin's intercession.² All cause of intervention however was removed by the accession of Eardwulf, who succeeded in restoring order for the next ten years;³ but with

¹ Alc. Op. (Migne), pt. i. epist. xiii.

² Haddan and Stubbs, "Councils," iii. 498.

³ Sim. Durh. "Gest. Reg." a. 796.

the death of Eardwulf in 806 the northern kingdom vanishes from history till its submission to Ecgberht seventeen years later.¹

Broken indeed by ceaseless strife Northumbria was ready to fall before a conqueror's sword. But no such doom seemed to threaten Mercia. In Mercia the royal stock went on unchallenged. No civil war disturbed the rule of Offa or of Cenwulf. No foreign ruler dared to threaten the Middle Kingdom as Charles had threatened the North. As the eighth century drew to its close, indeed, Mercia seemed destined rather to absorb its fellow states than to be absorbed by either of them. Northumbria was torn by anarchy. Wessex lay almost hidden from sight behind the forest-screen of the Andredsweald. All that the outer world saw of Britain was the realm of the Mercian kings. From Dover to the Ribble, from Bath to the Humber, the great mass of the island submitted to their sway ; and to the Frankish court the lord of this vast domain was already "king of the English." The ability of Offa and Cenwulf as rulers, as well as the length of their reigns, heightened the impression of Mercian strength. But even at the summit of

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¹ In his "Gesta Regum," Simeon of Durham practically ceases at 808 ; there are two ecclesiastical entries in 830 and 846, then from 849 the chronicle is for some time wholly drawn from southern sources, and without reference to the north. In his "Historia de Dunelmensi Ecclesia" there is a like gap between 793 and 867.

CHAP. I. their power, a close observer might have seen the inherent weakness of the structure they had built up. The kingdom in fact was held together simply by the sword. It stretched from sea to sea; but both on the eastern and the western coast its subject-provinces only waited the hour of trial to turn against it. The Welsh of North-Wales were ready to rise at any moment. Kent, a possession essential to the communication of Mercia with the western world, had risen against Offa and again risen against Cenwulf. The East-Anglians were now preparing to renew the strife which they had waged for centuries against the western Engle. And within Mercia itself there seems to have been little of that administrative organization which might have compensated for the hostility of its dependencies. The existence of five great ealdormen seems to point to a perpetuation of the purely local government in the provinces which made up the central realm. It was characteristic indeed of the looseness of its political structure that Mercia had no marked centre of government. Northumbria found a centre at York. Wessex recognised its royal town in Winchester. But Tamworth was simply a royal vill at which the Mercian kings dwelt more frequently than elsewhere. Mercia in fact owed its greatness wholly to the character of its individual kings. A single defeat under *Aethelbald* had already revealed its inherent weakness;

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and the same revelation was to follow its later defeat under Beorhtwulf.

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Wessex.

Wessex on the other hand, smaller as was its area and later as was its development than that of its fellow-kingdoms, had a vigour and compactness which neither of them possessed. Its military strength was really greater than theirs. From the first moment of their descent upon Britain the Gewissas had seized a region of surpassing military value. The Gwent was a natural fortress, backed by the sea, screened from attack on either side by impassable woodlands, by Selwood and the Andredswæld, and presenting along its front two parallel lines of heights, whose steep escarpments rose like walls in face of any assailants. Their main settlement, Winchester, lay in the centre of this region ; and a series of roads which diverged from it carried forces easily to any threatened point of the border. However Wessex might grow, the Gwent remained its heart and centre ; and the inaccessibility of the Gwent was shown by its security from any inroad till the coming of the Danes. Northumbrian hosts might pour over Mid-Britain, or Mercian hosts carry their ravages over Northumbria, but neither Mercian nor Northumbrian ever appeared before Winchester. The bulk of the West-Saxon fights were fought in the district over Thames ; and if invaders threatened the Gwent itself it was only, like Ceolric, to be thrown back discomfited from the steeps of

CHAP. I. Wanborough. Even Wulfhere after a great victory could penetrate no further into Wessex than the same steep of Ashdown. The varied composition of Ecgberht's kingdom, instead of proving a source of weakness, was itself a source of strength. *The England of Ecgberht.*

Its centre was the older Wessex we have described, the region between the Andredswæld and the Selwood; a district of purely English blood grouped round a single political and religious centre at Winchester. To the west lay the newer Wessex, a tract which indeed found a single ecclesiastical centre in Sherborne, but where Welsh and English blood mingled in the veins of the population, and in which the ethnological character varied from the English element dominant along the skirts of Selwood to the wholly Celtic life of the western Dyvnaint. But this newer Wessex was even more West-Saxon in temper than the Wessex of the Gwent. The slowness of its conquest, the gradual settlement of the conquerors over its soil, had bound it firmly to the house of Cerdic, and utterly obliterated its Celtic traditions. And besides this, the two portions were knit together by an administrative order which was hardly known elsewhere. Our ignorance of the early history of Wessex leaves us no means of tracing the origin of this order, but in Ecgberht's day at least it was firmly established. Every folk-district in the realm was placed in the hands of a single

ealdorman, an officer who by this time must have been of royal appointment, and who was above all the leader of its local force or "fyrd." It is through the mention of these officers that we see that Wessex was by this time at any rate parted into the administrative divisions that it still retains, and that the Somer-sætan, the Defn-sætan, and the Dor-sætan had their defined districts on one side the Selwood, as the settlers in the "Bearroc-wood," the Wil-sætan, and the original Gewissas in their tract about Hampton had on the other.

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It was this political and administrative superiority, even more than its military vigour, which so suddenly set Wessex at the head of the English states and gave into its hands the work of consolidating the English peoples. In Ecgberht's day, however, that work had hardly begun. Though every one of its states had submitted to his sway,¹ Ecgberht had not become a king of England. He had not even become a king of the Mercians, of the East Angles, or of the Northumbrians. It was not till Ælfred's day, a hundred years later, that a king of Wessex could call himself also king of the Mercians; it was not till Æthelstan that the ruler who was at once king of the West-Saxons and king of the Mercians could add to his title that of king of the Northumbrians.¹ Even then the bond which united the Three Kingdoms was

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and
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¹ See "Making of England," cap. viii. (A. S. G.).

CHAP. I. but the personal bond of their allegiance to the same ruler ; and it was not till the close of Eadgar's reign that the genius of Dunstan dared to create an England and to crown the lord of the three realms as its national king. But these things were far off in Ecgberht's time. His conquest had given him a supremacy over his fellow-kings, by which they and their peoples were bound to pay him tribute and to follow him in war. But their life remained in all other matters as independent as before. In spite of submission and tribute Northumbria seems to have remained almost wholly detached from its over-lords. Rival claimants for its throne fought on as of old, unhindered by any interference from the south ; and the successors of Ecgberht made not a single effort to rescue it from the Dane. East-Anglia remained under its old line of kings, almost as isolated as Northumbria from Wessex, and equally unaided by it in the coming struggle. Mercia itself, broken as it was by defeat after defeat, was far from passing into a mere province of the West-Saxon realm ; it retained its old national life as it retained its bounds ; and though Ecgberht drove its king Wiglaf from his throne, he was forced after three years of struggle to replace him on it. Even in later years it was by ties of blood and wedlock rather than by more direct bonds of subjection that the policy of Wessex strove to bring the midland realm beneath its sway. It was in fact only by long and patient effort that

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this vague supremacy of the West-Saxon kings could have been developed into a national sovereignty ; and the effort after such a sovereignty had hardly begun when it was suddenly broken by the coming of the Danes.

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CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF THE WIKINGS

829-858

The first
Wikings.

IN the days of Beorhtric of Wessex, while Offa was still ruling in Mercia, and Ecgberht an exile at the court of Charles, "in the year 787, came three ships" to the West-Saxon shores, "and then the reeve rode thereto, and would force them to go to the king's tun, for that he knew not what they were; and they slew folk."¹ Two hundred years later, in the midst of the long warfare which

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 787, which adds, "These were the first ships of Danish men that sought land of Engle folk." Munch, however ("Det Norske Folks Historie," German transl. by Claussen, pt. iv. p. 186), points out that this entry dates at earliest from 891, when the Danes were really the assailants of Britain, and that a more contemporary entry may be found in the late Canterbury Chronicle (F), where the ships are called "of Northmen from Heretha-land." "It is a strong testimony to the age of this account that the Vikings are called Northmen, for this name was lost in England earlier than elsewhere." "The so-called Heretha-land," he adds, "from which these northmen came can be none other than Hardeland or Harde-syssel, in Jutland, for from Hordeland in Norway no descents upon England had taken place at this time."

opened with the landing of the pirate-band, the memory of that first warning of danger was still fresh in the minds of men. "Suddenly," ran the later tradition preserved in the royal West-Saxon house, "there came a Danish fleet, not very alarming, consisting of three long ships, and this was their first coming. When this came to the ears of the king's reeve, who was then in the tun which is called Dorchester, he mounted his horse and with a few men hastened to the port, thinking they were merchants rather than enemies, and addressing them with authority ordered them to be carried to the king's tun; and by them he and those who were with him were there slain. Now the name of this reeve was Beaduheard."¹ Soon there were few tun-reeves who knew not what these strangers were, for six years later, in 793, their pirate-boats were ravaging the coast of Northumbria, plundering the monastery of Lindisfarne and murdering its monks;² and in 794 they entered the Wear to pillage and burn the houses of Wearmouth and Jarrow. "He who can hear of this calamity," wrote Alcuin as the news reached him in Gaul of the ruin of the houses which enshrined within them the religious history of Northumbria, the houses of Aidan and Cuthberht, of Benedict Biscop and of Baeda, "he who can hear

¹ Æthelweard, a. 787. Æthelweard was a descendant of Æthelred I., and probably the ealdorman of the Western Provinces in the reign of Æthelred II.

² Sim. Durh. "Gest. Reg." 793, 794.

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CHAP. II. of this calamity and not cry to God on behalf
The Coming of his country, has a heart not of flesh but of
 of the
Wikinga. stone.”¹

829-858. The descent of the three strange ships did in fact herald a new conquest of Britain. It was but the beginning of a strife which was to last unbroken till the final triumph of the Norman conqueror. For nearly a hundred years to come the shores of England were harried and its folk slain by successors of these northern pirates, till their scattered plunder-raids were merged in the more organized attack of the Danish sea-kings. The conquests of Ivar and Guthrum and Halfdene in the days of Aelfred were in their turn but the prelude to the bowing of all England to a foreign rule under Swein and Cnut. But in the end the fruit of the long attack slipped from Danish hands. The harvest indeed was reaped, but it was reaped by northmen who had ceased even in tongue to be northmen at all. Not the Danes of Denmark, but the Danes of Rouen, of Caen, of Bayeux, became lords of the realm of Aelfred and Eadgar. It was the sword of the Normans which drove for the last time from English shores the fleet of the Danes.

The Northern peoples. The new assailants announced themselves as men of the north, men from the lands beyond the Baltic; but this told Englishmen nothing. Though the Jutes who had shared in the conquest

¹ Alcuin Op. (Migne), pt. i. epist. xi.

of Britain had been at least akin in blood with the dwellers on either side the Cattegat, their work had soon come to an end ; and with it had ended for centuries all contact of the men of the north with Englishmen. It was not till the middle of the eighth century that dim news of heathen nations across the Baltic came from English missionaries who were toiling among the Saxons of the Elbe ; and an English poet, it may be an English mission-priest in the older home of his race, wove fragments of northern sagas into his Christianized version of the song of Beowulf. But to the bulk of Englishmen as to the rest of Christendom, these peoples remained almost unknown. Their life had indeed till now been necessarily a home life ; for instead of fighting and mingling with the world about them, they had had to battle for sheer existence with the stern winter, the barren soil, the stormy seas of the north. While Britain was passing through the ages of her conquest, her settlement, her religious and political reorganization, the Swede was hewing his way into the dense pine-forests that stretched like a sea of woodland between the bleak moorlands and wide lakes of his father-land ;¹ the Dane was finding a home in the

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¹ Olaf, King Ingiald's son, went westward with his men "to a river which comes from the north and falls into the Venner Lake and is called Klar river. There they set themselves down, turned to, and cleared the woods, burned, and then settled there. . . . Now when it was told of Olaf in

CHAP. II. reaches of birchwood and beechwood that covered
The Coming of the Vikings. the flat isles of the Baltic, and the Norwegian was
829-858. winning field and farm from the steep slopes of his narrow fiords.

Their temper. It was this hard struggle for life that left its stamp to the last on the temper of the Scandinavian peoples. The very might of the forces with which they battled gave a grandeur to their resistance. It was to the sense of human power that woke as the fisher-boat rode out of the storm, as the hunter ploughed his lonely way through the blinding snowdrift, as the husbandman waged his dogged warfare with unkindly seasons and barren fields, that these men owed their indomitable energy, their daring self-reliance, their readiness to face overwhelming odds, their slowness to believe themselves beaten. He who would win good fame, said an old law, must hold his own against two foes and even against three; it is only from four that he may fly without shame. Courage indeed was a heritage of the whole German race, but none felt like the man of the

Sweden that he was clearing the forests, they laughed at his doings and called him the Tree-feller" (*Olaf Trætelgia*). *Ynglinga Saga*, c. 46, in Laing's translation of the "Heimskringla" ("Sea Kings of Norway"), vol. i. p. 255. So of an earlier king, Onund, "Sweden is a great forest land, and there are such great uninhabited forests in it that it is a journey of many days to cross them. Onund bestowed great pains and cost in clearing the woods and tilling the cleared land. . . . Onund had roads made through all Sweden, both over morasses and mountains: and he was therefore called Onund Road-Maker" (*Brant-Anund*). *Ynglinga Saga*, c. 37, Laing, vol. i. 247.

north the glamour and enchantment of war. CHAP. II.
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828-858. Fighting was the romance that alone broke the stern monotony of his life ; the excitement and emotion which find a hundred spheres among men of our day found but this one sphere with him. As his boat swept out between the dark headlands at the fiord's mouth, the muscles that had been hardened by long strife with thankless toil quivered with the joy of the coming onset. A passion of delight rings through war-saga and song ; there are times when the northern poetry is drunk with blood, when it reels with excitement at the crash of sword-edge through helmet and bone, at the warrior's war-shout, at the gathering heaps of dead. The fever of fight drove all ruth and pity before it. Within the circle of his own home indeed the sternness of the life he lived did gentle work in the Wiking's heart.¹ Long winter and early nightfall gathered the household closely together round the common hearth, and nowhere did stronger ties bind husband to wife or child to father ; nowhere was there a deeper reverence for womanhood and the sanctities of womanhood. But when fight had once begun, the farmer and

¹ For their love of home see a touching scene in the Njal's Saga (trans. by Dasent, i. 236). Gunnar, doomed by the Thing to exile, goes down to the ship, then he turned with his face up towards the Lithe and the homestead at Lithend, and said, " Fair is the Lithe, so fair that it has never seemed to me so fair ; the corn-fields are white to harvest, and the home-mead is mown ; and now I will ride back home, and not fare over sea at all."

CHAP. II. fisher who loved his own wife and child with so tender a love became a warrior who hewed down the priest at his altar, drove mothers to slavery, tossed babes in grim sport from pike to pike.¹ The nations on whom these men were soon to swoop cowered panic-stricken before a pitilessness that seemed to them the work of madmen. “Deliver us,” ran the prayer of a litany of the time, “deliver us, O Lord, from the frenzy of the Northmen !”

**The
Northmen
and the sea.** What gave their warfare its special character was that its field was the sea. The very nature indeed of their home-land drove these men to the sea, for in all the northern lands society was as yet but a thin fringe of life edging closely the sea-brim. In Sweden or the Danish isles rough forest-edge or dark moor-slope pressed the village fields closely to the water's edge. In Norway the bulk of the country was a vast and desolate up-land of barren moor, broken only by narrow dales that widened as they neared the coasts into inlets of sea ; and it was in these inlets or fiords, in the dale at the fiord's head, or by the fiord's side, where the cliff-wall now softened into slopes to which his cattle clung, now drew back to make

¹ “Domos vestras combusserunt, res vestras asportarunt, pueros sursum jactatos lancearum acumine suscepserunt, coniuges vestras quasdam vi oppresserunt, quasdam secum adduxerunt.”—Hen. Hunt. lib. v. proœm. (ed. Arnold, p. 188). A Wiking named Oelver in the ninth century is said to have been nicknamed “Barnakarl” (or child's enecht), because he would not join in the tossing children on pikes. Munch, “Det Norske Folks Hist.” (Germ. tr.), pt. iv. p. 232.

room for thin slips of meadow-land and corn-land, CHAP. II.
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829-858. that the Norwegian found his home. Inland, where the bare mountain flats then rose like islands out of a sea of wood, the country was strange and dread to them; for the boldest shrank from the dark holts and pools that broke the desolate moorland, from the huge stones that turned into giants in the mists of nightfall, giants that stalked over the fell till the grey dawn smote them into stone again, from the wolves that stole along the fearsome fen-paths, and from the fell shapes into which their excited fancy framed the mists at eventide, shapes of giant "moor-steppers," of elves and trolls, of Odin with his wind-cloak wrapped round him as he hurried over the waste. But terror and strangeness vanished with a sight of the sea. To the man of the north the sea was road and hunting ground. It was a "water-street" between the scattered settlements; for few cared to push overland across the dark belts of moor that parted one fiord from another. Even more than the land about his home it was the dalesmen's harvest-field, for fisher's net had often to make up for scanty corn-growth and rotting crops, and quest of whale and seal carried them far along their stormy coasts.¹

The life of these northern folk was in its main features one with the life of the earlier English-

¹ See Othere's story in *Ælfred's "Orosius,"* at the close of Pauli's "Life of Alfred," p. 249.

CHAP. II. men.¹ Their home and home customs were the same. The ranks of society differed only in name. Our ætheling, ceorl, and slave are found in the oldest tradition of the north as Jarl, Carl, and Thrall;² in later times Carl begat the Bonder and Jarl the King. There was as little difference in their political or judicial institutions. The bonders gathered to the Thing as the ceorls to the Moot; we see the little "folks" who in our own history so soon fuse into larger peoples in the "fylki," each with its Jarl or King, eight of which found room for themselves in the district of Trondhjem alone.³ In religion too there was the same kinship. The gods that were common to the Teutonic race were worshipped in the northern lands as elsewhere, though nowhere among the German peoples did their story become clothed with so noble a poetry. The contrast of the warmth and peace within the home of the Scandinavian with the sternness and uproar of the winter world without it woke a wild fancy in the groups that clustered through the long even-tide round the glowing wood-ashes of the hearth. Thor's mighty hammer was heard smiting in the

¹ See Munch, "Det Norske Folks Historie," Germ. trans. by Claussen, pt. ii. pp. 140-257, for the details of their life.

² See the curious "Riggsmaal" in Edda Samundar, iii. 170-190. Copenhagen, 1828.

³ Saga of Harald Fairhair; Laing's "Sea-Kings of Norway" (translation of the "Heimskringla"), vol. i. p. 275. For the Fylki see Munch, "Det Norske Folks Hist." Germ. trans. pt. i. p. 126. etc.

thunder peal that rolled away over the trackless moors. Odin's mighty war-cry was heard in the wind-blast that rushed howling out to sea. The faint and brief daylight of mid-winter pointed forward to that "twilight of the gods," when even they should yield to the weird that awaited them, and the All-father himself should die.

There was the same likeness in their usages of war. In both peoples the war-band lay at the root of all. The young warriors of the folk gathered round a war-leader for fight and foray; sometimes the king of this dale or that summoned his fighting-men for more serious warfare; sometimes a farmer when seed-time was over mustered his bondmen for a harvest of pillage ere the time came for harvesting his fields. To reap the one harvest was counted through the north as honest and man-worthy a deed as to reap the other.¹ But while the English war-band made its foray over land, the northern war-band made its foray over sea. From the "wik," or creek where their long-ship lurked, the "Wikings," or "creek-men,"² as the adventurers were called, pounced upon their prey, or crept along the iron-bound coast,

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of the
Wikings.
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Their
warfare.

¹ See the story of Swein, Asleif's son, in the "Orkneyinga Saga" (tr. by Anderson), c. 72, etc., pp. 117, sq.

² For derivation and history of this word, see Munch, "Det Norske Folks Hist." pt. iv. p. 237 (German translation). It is used solely by voyagers to the western, never by those to the eastern seas. [For the meaning "men of the Bay," from the *Wick*, see "Corpus Poeticum Boreale" (ed. by G. Vigfusson and F. York Powell), I. lxiii. (A. S. G.)]

CHAP. II. striking here and there up the fiords to harry and
The Coming of the Vikings. to slay. The “long-ship” itself in its very con-
struction was above all a pirate ship; of great
829-858. length, but narrow beam and little depth of keel,¹ its admirable lines and all but flat bottom showed that it was built exclusively for speed. In rough water indeed the Viking ships were almost unmanageable, and a storm like that off the coast of Lindisfarne in 794 threw them helpless on the beach. Nor were they adapted for long sea journeys; there was little accommodation for crew or cargo; and the pirates were forced to moor at each sunset, to make a foray for what cattle might serve for their meal, and sleep beneath a sail on the beach. In fighting too, their slightness of construction, fastened together as their timbers often were by wattles of tree-roots for lack of iron, forbade any use of them in shock of ship against ship;² they were in fact lashed together, and their stern and forecastle used as platforms for their fighting crews. But they were well fitted for their special end. A

¹ The boat found recently under a mound at Gokstad in Norway is about seventy-eight feet long by sixteen and a half feet broad, and between five and six feet deep. She would draw about four feet of water, and was driven by sixteen oars on either side.

² The ships of the Vikings were not designed for sea fights; their main object was to serve merely as a means of transport from one field of plunder to another. See K. Maurer's review of Steenstrup's “Indledning i Normannertiden (Normaunerne, Bind 1.)” in the “Jenaer Literatur-Zeitung,” 4th series, No. 2 Jan. 13, 1877, p. 25. (A. S. G.)

heavy merchant vessel lay at the mercy of the Wiking's "keel," as it darted out from covert of headland or isle, while its flat bottom and shallow draught of water made every river-mouth a haven, and every river a road into the land that the pirates lusted to pillage.

At the causes that drew these men with the close of the eighth century¹ to their attack on western Christendom we can do little more than guess; for history of the north as yet there is none.² It may be, as after legend told, that the growth of population had outstripped the resources of the fiords, and the little commonwealths were forced by very hunger to drive out their younger folk.³ It may be that the work of union which was at last to knit these commonwealths together into peoples and nations, as well as the revolt

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Causes of
their
movement
to the south.

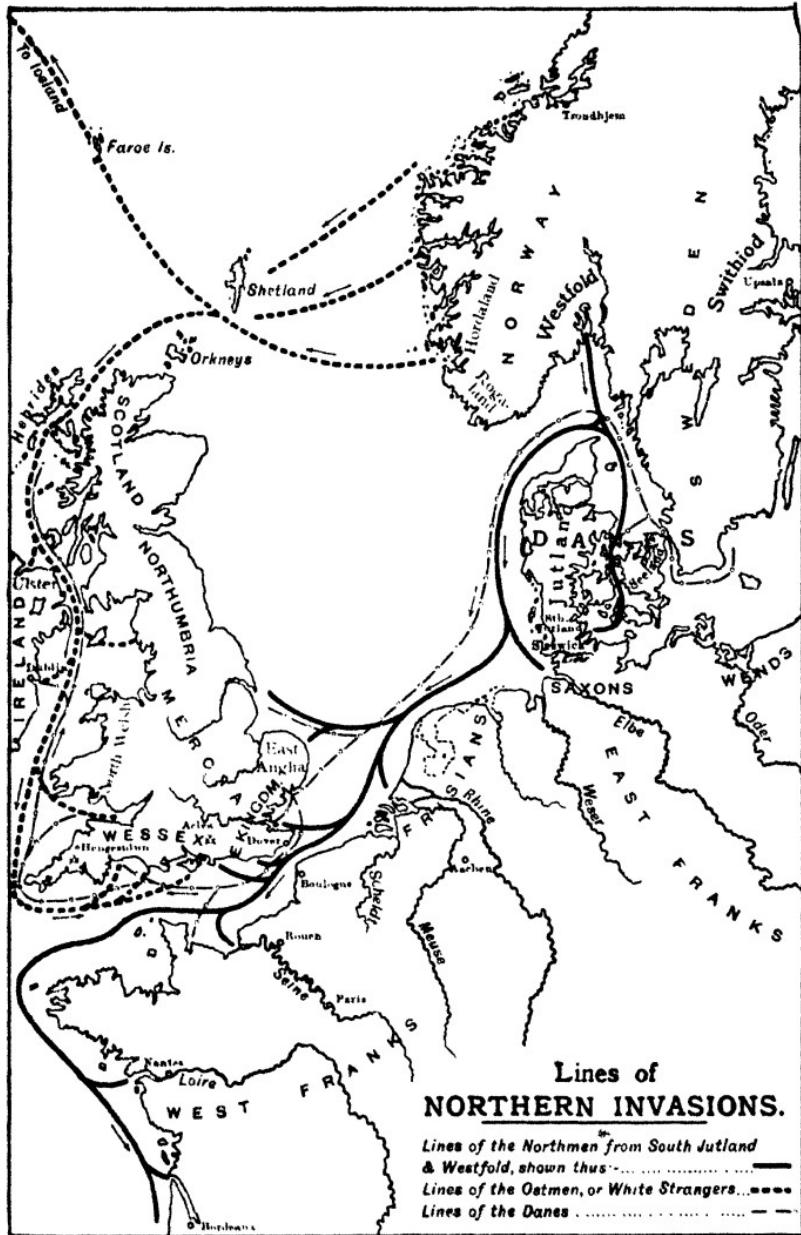
¹ The Scandinavian legends carry the conquests of the Northmen back to a far earlier time. But the joint evidence of the English, Irish, and Frankish chroniclers is conclusive in establishing the real date of their first attacks.

² Munch, in the opening of his great work, "Det Norske Folks Historie," has striven to penetrate the darkness by the help of philology, the older genealogies, etc.; but his success is far from being commensurate with his industry.

³ Laing ("Sea Kings of Norway," i. 109) shows the impossibility of widening the little farms along the fiords, and the consequent necessity for constant emigration. It is still seen in the large number of Scandinavian emigrants to America. See Munch, "Det Norske Folks Hist." (Germ. trans.), pt. i. p. 173, and Dudo, "Exuberantes atque terram, quam incolum, habitare non sufficienes, collecta sorte multitudine pubescenium, veterimo ritu in externa regna extruduntur nationum, ut adquirant sibi praelando regna, quibus vivere possint pace perpetua" (Duchesne, "Histor. Norm." p. 62). Olaf Trygvasson's Saga mentions a tradition that in case of famine all who could

CHAP. II. against it, had already begun. The men of the north shared with the rest of the Teutonic family its love of freedom and self-government ; but the severance of settlement from settlement by long reaches of desolate moorland gave this spirit of independence a harder and fiercer tone than elsewhere. It became a wild and passionate hatred of the subordination and obedience which wider union and a common government necessarily bring with them. No seas were too strange to traverse, no land too far to fly to, when the northman was called to bow to the rule of a common king. But the full effect of this temper was not to be felt for a hundred years, and in seeking for the causes of their action at this earlier time it is perhaps needless to look further than to the hope of plunder. What a spell the sudden disclosure of a world's wealth casts on whole peoples we know from the memories of the Spain of Charles the Fifth and the England of Elizabeth. But the expeditions of Cortes or Raleigh were only the last outbreaks of a passion which had lingered on from the very outset of human history. As soon as men gathered in village and seaport

not feed themselves, old and sick, were slain. [Steenstrup accepts the theory of over-population (which he attributes to the practice of polygamy) as the cause of emigration. K. Maurer, on the other hand, argues from the account given in Landnamabok of Harald Fairhair's attempts to check emigration that the country cannot have been over-peopled. See Maurer's review of Steenstrup in "Jenäer Literatur-Zeitung," Jan. 13, 1877, p. 25. (A. S. G.)]



Lines of
NORTHERN INVASIONS.

*Lines of the Northmen from South Jutland
A Westfold shown thus:-*

Lines of the Oatman or White Strangers

Lines of the Danes.

CHAP. II. the boats of Greek pirates swarmed over the Hellenic seas. Rome in the very height of her power had to battle with pirate fleets which grew with the growing commerce of the Mediterranean. It was the wealth of the Empire, the dream of sacking her towns and pillaging her treasures, which drew on her the German peoples in her decay. And now that the world which had reeled under that mighty shock was again organizing itself round powers which recalled the greatness as well as the name of Rome—now that commerce was covering the sea afresh with its merchant boats, and new towns rising within deserted walls, and wealth gathering once more under the shelter of church and abbey, the thirst for plunder woke again in the north. The boats which had sailed from its fiords to pillage the dales of their neighbours steered southwards for a richer spoil.

**The Vikings
and the
Franks.**

From the opening of the ninth century we see them pushing boldly to the south along two distinct lines of advance on either side of Britain, along the coast of Ireland, and along the coast of Gaul. The starting-point of the last advance was a region familiar to us as the original Engle-land,¹ but which was now known as South Jutland, and whose earlier peoples had been replaced by dwellers

¹ Wulfstan told Ælfred of his sail past "Jutland, Zeeland, and many islands." "In these lands," comments the King, "the Engle dwelt before they came hither to this land."—Ælfred's "Orosius," in Pauli's "Life of Alfred," p. 253.

of Scandinavian blood. The political geography of the north was far from having taken as yet its after-shape. The kingdom of Swithiod indeed in the lands about Upsala already gave promise of the future Sweden, but only a germ of the later Norway could be seen in the little kingdom of Westfold round the Christiania fiord. Small however as this was, it had shown itself vigorous enough to set up a line of dependent kings in South Jutland;¹ and it was the raids of these kings along the Frankish shores that in the year 800, when his power had reached its highest point, drew Charles the Great to the northern borders of his realm. The garrisons he stationed along the coast, as well as a fleet which he ordered to be built in its harbours, showed how keen was his sense of the danger that threatened the western world. His precautions indeed were not an hour too soon. In 803, during his last struggle with the Saxons, Gudrød or Godfrid, king both of Westfold and South Jutland, advanced with a fleet as far as Sleswick, and gave shelter to the warriors who fled from the sword of the Franks. Five years later a raid of the same king across the Elbe again called the Frankish arms to the north, and Godfrid drew across the peninsula the defensive line of earthworks called the Dane-work to arrest them.

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¹ For these kings in Westfold and South Jutland, see Munch, "Det Norske Folks Historie" (Germ. trs.), pt. iv. pp. 134-154.

CHAP. II. So formidable indeed was this freebooter's presence that Charles was already preparing an expedition against Jutland when Godfrid himself challenged the encounter in 810 by a descent on Frisia with two hundred ships, and, making himself master of the country after three combats with its people, boasted that he would soon go and enthrone himself in the emperor's own Aachen. The danger indeed passed away as suddenly as it had risen, for the northern king was slain by one of his followers: his kingdom was broken up; and a nephew, Heming, who succeeded him in the Jutish part of it, made peace with the Franks. But even this peace, and a civil war among the northmen which followed it, did not quiet the emperor's anxiety, for on the eve of his death, in the autumn of 811, we find him visiting Boulogne to see the ships whose building he had ordered the year before: and after restoring the old Roman lighthouse which served to guide ships along the coast, he made his way thence to the banks of the Scheldt, where vessels were also in process of construction. During the early part of the reign of his son, the Emperor Lewis, a continuance of the civil war among the northmen served even more than these fleets to secure the Frankish coast; and the aid of the emperor enabled Harold or Heriold, one of the claimants of the throne, again to detach Jutland from Westfold. But Harold's conversion to Christianity was at

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Their descents on Frisia.

once followed by his expulsion from the land ; CHAP. II.
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829-858. and from this moment the old attacks were resumed as fiercely as ever, till the strife between Lewis and his sons broke down the barriers between the northmen and their prey, and the pirate-boats ravaged without hindrance from the mouth of the Elbe to the mouth of the Rhine.

It was a party of these marauders along the Frankish coast who at last pushed across the Channel to the mouth of the Thames and ravaged in 834 the Isle of Sheppey.¹ But whatever influence the advance of the Wikings along the coast of Gaul may have had on the southern or eastern states of Britain, the attention of Ecgberht himself must have been fixed even more intently on their parallel line of advance to the west.² Ireland was as yet a more tempting prey for the pirates than even Gaul.³ It was at the monasteries that these earlier raids were mainly aimed ; and nowhere were the monastic houses so many and so rich. It was in these retreats indeed, sheltered as men deemed by their holiness from the greed of

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 832 (4).

² Additional proof that the earlier attacks on southern Britain came from Ireland is given by a hoard of Anglo-Saxon coins, many of them Kentish, found at Delgany in Wicklow, to which attention has been drawn by Mr. John Evans. The latest in date are those of Beornwulf, from 820 to 824, while neither in Sweden nor Denmark have such coins been found of earlier date than 830.

³ For the Northmen in Ireland, see especially "The War of the Gædhil with the Gaill," ed. by Dr. Todd, 1867 ; and its learned Introduction.

CHAP. II. the spoiler, that the whole wealth of the country
~~The Coming~~ was stored; and the goldwork and jewelry of
~~of the~~
~~Wikings.~~ their shrines, their precious chalices, the silver-
829-858. bound horn which king or noble dedicated at
 their altars, the curiously wrought covering of
 their mass-books, the hoard of their treasure-
 chests, fired the imagination of the northern
 marauders as the treasures of the Incas fired that
 of the soldiers of Spain. News spread fast up
 dale and fiord how wealth such as men never
 dreamed of was heaped up in houses guarded only
 by priests and shavelings who dared not draw
 sword. The Vikings had long been drawing
 closer to this tempting prey. From the coast of
 Norway¹ a sail of twenty-four hours with a fair
 wind brings the sailor in sight of the Shetlands;²
 Shetlands and Orkneys furnished a base for the
 advance of the pirates along the western shores of
 Britain, where they found a land like their own in
 the dales and lochs of Ross and Argyll, and where
 the names of Caithness and Sutherland tell of
 their conquest and settlement on the mainland;
 while the physical appearance of the people still

¹ The earlier assailants of Ireland are called "White Loch lann," who are supposed to be Norwegians; the later "Danar" or Danes. But "we cannot be sure that the name 'Dane' is not sometimes given to the Norwegians." Todd, "War of Gaedhil and Gaill," Intr. xxxi. Geographical considerations however seem decisive as to the starting-point of the attack on the Isles and Ireland.

² Munch, "Det Norske Folks Hist." (Germ. trans.), pt. iv. p. 212.

records their colonization of the Hebrides.¹ CHAP. II.
 Names such as that of the Orm's Head mark their entrance at last into the Irish Channel;² and here they had for more than thirty years been ravaging along either coast, but seeking out and plundering above all the religious houses with which Ireland was studded.

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In 832 however, but four years after the submission of all England to Ecgberht, these raids gave way to an organized invasion; for the host of a leader named Turgesius³ or Thorgils, establishing itself at Armagh, levied tribute from all the north of Ireland. What must have given its main import to this settlement in Ecgberht's eyes was the fact that it brought with it a revival of the struggle with the Welsh. His conquest of Cornwall had seemed the last blow in a strife of more than four hundred years; but the blow was hardly struck when the action of the northmen in the Irish seas roused the West-Welsh to fresh hopes of freedom. The scanty traces of their presence show that the pirates attempted little in the way of settlement

The Wikinga
and the
Welsh.

¹ Worsaae, "The Danes and Northmen," sec. ix.

² The "Annals of Ulster" note their first appearance in 794 (really 795), "The burning of Rechru by the Gentiles, and its shrines were broken and plundered." Rechru is probably Lambay Island. From a passage in Caradoc of Llancarvan, this would seem to have been after their defeat in a descent on Glamorgan. Todd, "War of Gædil and Gaill," Intr. xxiii.-iii.

³ Snorro's Saga of Harald Fairhair (Laing's "Heimskringla," vol. i. p. 304) makes this Thorgils a son of Harald, sent by him to Ireland. But Harald did not begin his reign till thirty years later; and was then but a boy of ten years old.

CHAP. II. itself as a conquered country or as linked to **The Coming of the Vikings.** Wessex simply by the sword ; for Ecgberht claimed to be nearest in blood to the house of Hengest, **829-858.** and to be thus as fully hereditary king of Kent as he was of Wessex. The two kingdoms therefore were united, not by a subordination of one to the other, but by their obedience to a common king. Such a relation made it possible to solve the problem of the government of Kent by setting over it as under-king the elder among the sons of the king of Wessex, and by grouping about it Essex, Surrey, and Sussex, to form a realm which bore the name of the Eastern Kingdom.¹

Its military organization.

Differences so marked as those which existed between the three divisions of Wessex might well have imperilled its political unity ; what they actually did was to triple its military strength. We shall see the Danes conquering Northumbria or Mercia in a single campaign. But to conquer Wessex required a threefold effort. When the pirates, after years of ravage, had practically torn from it the Eastern Kingdom, Wessex itself faced the invaders behind the Andredswæld ; and even when the older realm had at last been overrun, a West-Saxon king could still fall back on the Wessex beyond Selwood. And to this natural strength was added the strength of a distinct

¹ Charter of Ecgberht, 823 : "filii nostri Æthelwulf, quem regem constituimus in Cantia" (Thorpe, "Diplomatarium," p. 66). Æthelwulf's own charter to Chertsey (*ib.* p. 78) shows that Kent here means the whole Eastern Kingdom.

military organization. The fyrd of each folk-district was placed in the hands of an ealdorman appointed by the king ; nor was this arrangement confined to Wessex itself, for in each part of the "Eastern Kingdom" also we find an ealdorman acting side by side with the under-king.¹ The military value of this organization was soon seen in the freedom and elasticity which it gave to the later resistance against the Danes.

But Ecgberht was far from relying only on his warlike resources. In his attitude towards the Church he followed no doubt the example of the Frankish kings. From the earlier Pippin to Charles the Great the rulers of the Franks had striven to raise the social and political importance of the clergy. Within their older dominions they looked upon prelate and priest as the main elements of social order and intellectual progress ; in their newer conquests they planted religious foundations as centres of a new civilization. Motives of hardly less weight would in any case have forced the same policy on Ecgberht. In the realms which his sword had begun to build up into a new England the Church was the one power which he found unbroken. The anarchy of each kingdom within itself, the strife of one kingdom with another, had only served to give the priesthood a new political weight. In countries where the German invaders

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Position of
the Church.

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 853.

CHAP. II. found Christianity already established, and bowed *The Coming of the Vikings.* to its supremacy, the bishop, enthroned in his Roman town and representing the Roman population in its attitude towards the conqueror, had from the first taken a separate political position which strengthened into temporal princedom as time went on. But great as such a position seemed, it in fact brought him to the level of the secular nobles about him. Like them he became necessarily embroiled in civil strife ; like them he was the sport of ill-fortune as of good ; and ill-fortune meant in his case, as in theirs, exile or deposition or death. But an English bishop was from the first one in blood and interest with the whole of his English flock. His diocese was the kingdom. His bishop's seat was the king's town. He sate beside king or ealdorman in folk-moot or witenagemot. His position was as national as theirs ; but it had in it an element of permanence which their position lacked. At the close of the eighth century, while kings were being set aside and caldormen slain, the bishop, drawn by no personal interest into the strife of warring factions, rested unharmed in his bishop's chair. In realms like Kent, where the civil organization broke utterly down, its ruin only added fresh greatness to the spiritual organization beside it. The weakness of the later kings of Hengest's race, their wreck in the struggle of Wessex and Mercia for the Kentish kingdom, raised the Archbishops of Canterbury into a power

with which rulers like Offa and Cenwulf were forced to reckon.

The policy of the Mercian kings had been one of jealousy of this new power and influence of the Church. Ecgberht on the other hand, like the Frank sovereigns in whose court he learned the art of rule, seized on the priesthood as allies and co-operators in the work he had to do. His earlier work of national consolidation indeed was a work which the Church had been doing ever since the days of Theodore. Its synods were the first national gatherings; its canons the first national laws; its bishops, chosen as they often were with little regard to their local origin, were the first national officers. The national character of the Church rose into yet greater prominence as the hopes of political union died away; and from the defeat of Æthelbald to Ecgberht's day the ecclesiastical body remained the one power that struggled against the separatist tendencies of the English states and preserved some faint shadow of national union. That Ecgberht should seek its aid in his work of consolidation and order would in any case therefore have been natural enough.¹ But the inroads of the Vikings supplied a yet stronger ground of union between the Church and the new kingdom. Each suddenly found itself confronted by a common enemy. The foe that threatened

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Ecgberht's
ecclesiasti-
cal policy.

¹ For Ecgberht's attitude to the Church, see Stubbs's "Constit. Hist." vol. i. p. 269.

CHAP. II. ruin to the political organization of England
The Coming of the Vikings. threatened ruin to its religious organization as well. In the attack of the northern peoples, 829-858. heathendom seemed to fling itself in a last desperate rally on the Christian world. Thor and Odin were arrayed against Christ. Abbey and minster were the special objects of the pirates' plunder. Priests were slain at the altar, and nuns driven scared from their quiet cells. Library and scriptorium, costly manuscript and delicate carving, blazed in the same pitiless fire. It was not the mere kingdom of Ecgberht, it was religion and learning and art whose very existence was at stake. It was a common danger therefore that drew Church and State together into a union closer than had been seen before. In 838 Ecgberht promised lasting peace and protection to the see of Canterbury, and received from Archbishop Ceolnoth a pledge of firm and unshaken friendship from henceforth for ever.¹ Like pledges were given and taken from Winchester, and, as we may believe, from the rest of the English Churches.

Æthelwulf. This alliance was the last political act of Ecgberht's reign, but its results were felt as soon as his son Æthelwulf mounted the throne in the year which followed it, 839; and the energetic attitude of such a bishop as Falhstan of Sherborne, the political influence of Bishop Swithun of Winchester, mark the new part which the Church was

¹ Stubbs and Haddan, "Councils," iii. 617.

henceforth to play in English affairs. As bishop of the royal city of Winchester Swithun was naturally drawn close to the throne; and throughout Æthelwulf's days he seems to have acted as the king's counsellor.¹ But Æthelwulf was far from being the mere tool of his minister. To the charges made in later times against the son of Ecgberht the actual history of his reign gives little countenance. He is reproached with weakness and inactivity, with an unwarlike temper, and with an excessive devotion to the Church. But it is hard to see any want of energy in the king's actual conduct. His steady fight with the Danes, as well as the crowning victory which foiled their heaviest attack at Aclea, show his worth as a warrior; while the firmness with which he carried out Ecgberht's policy at home and his effort to organize a common European resistance to the northern marauders show his capacity as a statesman.

Æthelwulf had hardly mounted the throne when he had to meet the foe whom his father's sword had driven for a brief space from the land, for not even such a victory as Hengest-dun could long check the attack of the pirates who were cruising in ever growing numbers over the Irish Sea. Their successes, as we have seen, had now given them a base of operations in Ireland itself, the north of which seemed passing into the hands

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¹ Will. Malm. "Gest. Reg." (Hardy), vol. i. p. 151.

CHAP. II. of the Wikings.¹ Undisputed master of Ulster, **The Coming of the Wikings.** Thorgils dealt a heavy blow at the religion and civilization of the island by the destruction of Armagh, and pressed hard upon Meath and Connaught. Meanwhile, scattered squadrons were seizing point after point along the shore, raising forts and planting colonies to which Ireland owed the rise of its earliest towns, for Dublin, Waterford, Limerick, and Cork all sprang from pirate settlements.² It was thus from a land that seemed all but their own that the Ostmen, as the Wikings were called in these parts, could direct their attacks against the unharried country across St. George's Channel. But they found a vigorous and well-organized resistance. In 837 an attack on the very heart of the realm was repulsed by the fyrd of Hamton-shire under ealdorman Wulfheard.³ The bulk of the pirate raids however were as yet directed against the country to the west beyond Selwood, the district which from its half Celtic population was known as that of the Wealh-cyn, and where, in spite of the failure of the Cornwealas in their revolt against Ecgberht, they might still hope for aid from the western Welsh. Here however the local fylds fought as

¹ For the character of Thorgils' settlement, see Todd, "War of Gedhil and Gaill," Intr. p. xlviii.

² "It was in 837 or 838 that Dublin was first taken by the foreigners, who erected a fortress there in 841 or 842." - Todd, "War of Gedhil and Gaill," Intr. p. iii.

³ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 837.

resolutely as in Hamton-shire. In the very year of Wulfheard's success ealdorman *Æthelhelm* at the head of the Dorset-folk fell beaten after a well-fought struggle with a pirate force which landed at Portland;¹ and three years later King *Æthelwulf* was himself defeated in an encounter with thirty-five pirate ships at their old landing-place at Charmouth;² but in 845 the fylds of Somerset and Dorset, with their ealdormen and their bishop *Ealhstan* at their head, repulsed the invaders with heavy loss at the mouth of the Parret, and six years later they were driven back with slaughter by the fyrd and ealdorman of Devon.³

The stout fighting of the men of Wessex was no doubt aided by a sudden weakening in the position of their assailants; for in the year of Bishop *Ealhstan*'s victory at the Parret, Thorgils was slain in a rising of the Irish tribes of the north,⁴ and his host driven from the land, while the Ostmen of the coast wasted their strength in bitter warfare between the older settlers and fresh comers from the northern lands.⁵ But whether from her own resistance or the weakness of her foes, Wessex at last gained

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), 837.

² *Ibid.* 840.

³ *Ibid.* 845, 851.

⁴ See for date Todd, "War of *Gædhil* and *Gaill*," Intr. xlifi.

⁵ According to the "Annals of Ulster," the "Dubhgáill," Black Gentiles, or Danes, first came to Ireland in 851, and their coming was at once followed by a great battle with the "Fingaill," or Norwegians.—Todd, "War of *Gædhil* and *Gaill*," Intr. lxxviii.

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CHAP. II. a breathing-space in the struggle : and for twenty years to come only a single descent on her coast disturbed the peace which she had won. The

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cessation of the strife in one quarter, however, was but the signal for its outbreak in another. The Wikings, as we have seen, had pushed forward from their home in two parallel lines of advance, one, mainly from Norway, by the Shetlands and the Hebrides along the coast of Ireland, the other, mainly from South Jutland, along the coast of Friesland and of Gaul. The last had till now found a formidable barrier in the resistance of the empire. But the wars which broke out only a few years after Æthelwulf's accession between the sons of Lewis the Pious threw open Frank-land to the pirates' arms ; and after pushing up the Seine and the Loire to the sack of Rouen and Nantes they reached the Garonne in 844, and wrecked its country as far as Toulouse. In 845 a mighty host crowned the work of havoc by the sack of Paris ; and with fresh fire thus added to their greed, fleet after fleet poured along the coast of Gaul. Their aid roused the Bretons into revolt : while victories over the troops of the Franks gave Saintes and Limoges to pillage. The pirate raids threatened to take the form of permanent conquests. One host settled down in Friesland ; another seized the district between the Scheldt and the Meuse ; the fleets which pillaged along the Seine and the Loire began to winter

boldly in the islands of the two rivers ; while in 848 a pirate force mastered the town of ^{CHAP. II.} ~~The Coming of the Vikings.~~ ^{829-858.} Bordeaux and made it a place of arms. From this hour the Vikings were masters of western Frankland, moving with little resistance from river to river, and gathering booty at their will.

It may have been the very success of their work, however, on the one side of the Channel that had hindered them as yet from undertaking any very serious work on the other. From the outset of Æthelwulf's reign, indeed, their presence had been felt on the eastern coast of Britain ; in 838 we hear of descents on Lindsey and East Anglia ;¹ and in spite of the silence of our annals these descents were probably often repeated through the years that followed. On Kent naturally their attacks fell more frequently. Nowhere in Britain was there a more tempting field for the spoiler. Its early civilization, its importance as the road of communication with the Continent, made Kent one of the wealthiest and most thriving parts of Britain ; its bounds were steadily enlarging as the Kentishmen cleared their way into the skirts of the Weald, and rescued from the woodland the fertile tract along the upper Medway ; and if the silting up of the Wantsum had closed the harbour of Richborough, the growing trade with Gaul had but passed to

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 838.

CHAP. II. Dover and to Sandwich.¹ The central borough *The Coming of Kent, Canterbury, was in size and wealth among the greatest of English cities; and it was the seat of a Primacy which the suppression of that of Lichfield left without a rival in southern Britain. What was yet more important in the pirates' eyes was the wealth of its religious houses. Half Thanet belonged to the abbey at Minster; while the estates of the two monasteries at Canterbury were scattered over the whole face of the shire.*

The victory at Aclea. While Æthelwulf guarded Wessex, it was here that his son Æthelstan met the assailants of his kingdom in the east. In 838 the same force which ravaged Lindsey and East Anglia slew ealdorman Herebriht and many with him in a descent on the flats of the Mersc-wara, and harried and slew in Kent itself.² In the next year, after a raid on Canterbury, the pirates pushed up the Thames to London and Rochester.³ Then for a while the land had rest, till in 851 the under-king and ealdorman of Kent repulsed a raid upon Sandwich, and even captured nine of the pirate ships. The squadron, however, which they thus beat off was only the advance guard of a host which was now preparing for an attack; and in the course of the same year a fleet of three

¹ This must have been very early; as Dover was already a port in Ealdhelm's day, and Sandwich in Wilfrid's.

² Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 838.

³ *Ibid.* 839.

hundred and fifty pirate vessels, starting, as it would seem, from the settlement which had been made in the island of Betau, moored at the mouth of the Thames,¹ sacked Canterbury, pillaged London in spite of the efforts of the Mercian king, Beorhtwulf, who advanced to oppose them, and pushed through Surrey into the heart of Britain. Here however Æthelwulf, summoned at last to his aid by the Kentish king, threw himself across their path; and a long and stubborn fight at Aclea ended in the defeat of the marauders. More pirates fell on the field, boasted the conquerors, than had ever fallen on English ground before; and the completeness of the repulse was seen in the withdrawal of the host to its old field of plunder across the Channel. But the Wikings were far from any thought of abandoning their prey. Two years later two ealdormen, at the head of the fylds of Kent and Surrey, fell after a well-fought fight with a host in Thanet;² while in 855 the pirates encamped for the whole winter in the Isle of Sheppey.

What was needed to shake off this persistent attack of the Wikings from Gaul was, as Æthelwulf saw, the alliance and co-operation of the Frankish king who was struggling against them in Gaul itself. If the first result of the pirate storm had been to further English unity by allying the new English state with the English

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 851.

² *Ibid.* a. 855.

CHAP. II.
The Coming
of the
Wikings.
829-858.

Conquest of
the North
Welsh.

CHAP. II. Church, its second result was to force the state ^{The Coming of the Vikings.} into closer relations with its fellow states of Christendom. At the beginning of his reign ^{829-858.} Æthelwulf had opened communications with the Emperor Lewis the Gentle for common action in meeting the common danger; but it is in his later years that we see ^{*} the first distinct announcement of an international policy, the first English recognition of a common interest among the western nations, in the resolve of the king to cross the seas for counsel and concert with Charles the Bald. Work, however, had to be done before he could quit the realm.¹ On both sides of the Channel, as we have seen, the appearance of the foe from the north had given a signal for the uprising of the Celt; and while in Gaul the Bretons had shaken off the yoke of Charles the Bald and set up again a Breton kingdom under Breton kings, in Britain the West-Welsh had risen against their West-Saxon over-lords, and the North-Welsh had thrown off the Mercian supremacy. So formidable indeed was the last revolt that in 853, two years after the battle of Aclea, the Mercian king Burhred, Beorhtwulf's successor, was forced to appeal to his West-Saxon

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 853; Asser (ed. Wise), p. 6. One part of Æthelwulf's preparation was the grant of a sixth part of the rents from his private dominions for ecclesiastical and charitable purposes (Asser, ed. Wise, p. 8). By an early fraud this was represented as a grant of a tenth of the whole revenue of the kingdom, and as the legal origin of tithes. See Kemble, "Saxons in England," ii. 480-490.

over-lord for aid ; and it was only a march of their joint forces into the heart of North Wales, with the conquest of Anglesea, that forced the Welsh ruler, Roderic Mawr, again to own the English supremacy and to pay tribute to Mercia.

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In spite of the wintering of a pirate force in Sheppey, the two triumphs of Æthelwulf in Surrey and in Wales left Britain sufficiently tranquil in 854 to suffer him to leave its shores. His first journey however recalls to us how much more the danger from the marauders seemed to men of that day a religious than a political one. He undertook a pilgrimage to Rome. We know little of the pilgrimage or of his stay at the imperial city, though it lasted a whole year and cannot but have served to draw closer the connexion of the English Church with the Mother-Church from which it sprang. From Rome however he passed at length to the court of the Franks.

Æthelwulf's
visit to
Charles the
Bald.

Blow after blow had shattered the Frankish state since Egberht half a century earlier quitted Charles the Great to seek his throne in Wessex. The vast realm had been torn to pieces by the dissensions of its rulers, as well as by the revival of national spirit among the peoples out of whom it had been built up. A ring of enemies had gathered round it on every border. Sclaves and Magyars pressed on its German frontier. The Saracens wasted Italy. The northmen carried fire and sword over western Frankland, the country west of the Meuse

CHAP. II. and the Rhone, a fragment of the old Frank realm **The Coming of the Vikings** which had fallen in the strife that followed the death of Lewis the Gentle to his youngest son, **829-858.** Charles the Bald. The reign of Charles had as yet been one of terrible misfortunes ; for brave and active as he was, his vigour spent itself fruitlessly on the crowd of foes who surrounded him, on the rising of the Breton, the revolt of Gascony, the strife of his own house for rule, the never-ceasing forays of the northmen. Beaten and baffled as he seemed however, Charles fought on ; and the struggle of the harassed king, if it failed to save his own realm, did somewhat to save *Æthelwulf's*. The visit of *Æthelwulf* to the Frankish court, where he spent three months in the summer of 856, was a recognition of their common work : and his marriage with the Frank king's young daughter, Judith, with which the visit closed, marks probably the conclusion of a formal alliance, perhaps of a common plan of operations with Charles the Bald.¹

Æthelwulf's return and death. But the policy of *Æthelwulf* was in advance of his age. England had hardly as yet realized the need of national unity, and outside the king's

¹ Eng. Chron. a. 855 ; Prudent. Trec. Ant. a. 856 (ap. Pertz. i. 450), who dates the betrothal in July, the marriage at Verberie on the Oise on Oct. 1, says that Hincmar, "imposito capiti ejus diadema regis nomine insignit, quod sibi suæque genti eatus fuerat insuetum." The marriage can have only been a formal one, as Judith was but twelve years old. The marriage of Judith to *Æthelbald*, on his father's death, had no doubt the same purely political meaning.

council chamber there can have been few who CHAP. II.
 understood the need of union between the nations *The Coming
 of the
 Wikings.*
 of Christendom. The descents of the Wikings had as yet with a single exception been but isolated plunder-raids, and their very success against the invaders would help to blind Englishmen to a sense of their danger. The new connexion with the Frankish king, on the other hand, may have roused suspicions of a plan for setting aside the elder sons of Æthelwulf in favour of the issue of his marriage with Judith; and if such suspicions were once aroused, they would be quickened by the coronation of the queen, a ceremony which was as yet against the wont of the West Saxons.¹ Whatever was the cause of the rising, on his return at the close of 856 Æthelwulf found Wessex in arms. In a gathering at Selwood² its thegns had pledged themselves to place the king's eldest living son, Æthelbald who on the death of his brother Æthelstan a few years back had suc-

¹ Asser (ed. Wise), p. 9; Will. Malm. "Gest. Reg." (Hardy), i. 169. At some time before Æthelwulf's journey the question of the succession had been settled in a somewhat peculiar way. His next successor would naturally be his eldest son, the "Eastern King," Æthelstan; but, whether from the failing health which the death of Æthelstan soon after may indicate or no, it seems to have been needful to look further, and to arrange that the crown should pass at his death to his three brothers successively in the order of their birth, setting aside the children of all of them. Æthelstan died before his father's return; and the next son, Æthelbald, may have looked on the alleged coronation of his youngest brother Ælfred at Rome, or on the marriage with Judith, as threatening his right of succession under this arrangement.

² Asser (ed. Wise), p. 8.

CHAP. II. ceded him in charge of the Eastern Kingdom, on
The Coming the throne of Wessex, and their course was backed
of the
Wikings. by Bishop Ealhstan of Sherborne. Swithun, on
829-858. the other hand, remained true to Æthelwulf, and
the Kentishmen welcomed him back to their
shores. But Æthelwulf had no mind for civil
strife. He was already drawing fast to the grave,
and if we judge his conduct by the past history of
his reign, rather than by the charges of weakness
which later tradition brought against him, we may
see in his summons of a Witenagemot to settle this
question, the reluctance of a noble ruler to pur-
chase power for himself by again rending England
asunder in face of the foe. The voice of the
Witan bade Æthelwulf content himself with the
Eastern Kingdom; and abandoning Wessex to
Æthelbald, the king dwelt quietly in this under-
realm for the brief space of life which still was
left him.¹

¹ Will. Malm. "Gest. Reg." (Hardy), v. 170; Asser (ed. Wise), p. 9.

CHAPTER III

THE MAKING OF THE DANELAW

858-878

A FEW months after his withdrawal to the Eastern realm brought Æthelwulf to the grave at the opening of 858;¹ and Æthelbald enjoyed but for two years longer the crown which revolt had given him. The reign of his brother Æthelberht,² who followed him in 860, was almost as short and uneventful; and for some years there was little to break the peace of the land save a raid of the

The final
attack on
Britain.

¹ "Idibus Januarii, Prud. Tree. Ann. a. 858 (ap. Pertz. l. 451).

² By Æthelwulf's will Æthelberht, who succeeded him as under-king in Kent, should have remained there at Æthelbald's death, while Wessex fell to his younger brother Æthelred; but the will must have been set aside by the Witan as inconsistent with the arrangement by which the brothers were to follow one another in order of age. Both the bequest and the setting aside are of the highest import for our after history; the first as the earliest known instance of a claim to "bequeath" the crown as a personal property, the second as showing such a claim to be as yet not admitted.

CHAP. III. northmen on Winchester,¹ which was avenged by the men of Hampshire and Berkshire under their ealdormen,² and a ravaging of the eastern shores of Kent by pirates from Gaul in 864. But with the death of Æthelberht and the accession of his next surviving brother Æthelred in 866, the northern storm broke with far other force upon Britain.³ Its occupation had now indeed become almost a necessity for the Wikings. It was the one measure which could draw their other conquests together. They already occupied the Feroes and the Shetlands, the Orkney isles and the Hebrides. On either side of Britain they were a settled power. The east coast of Ireland was dotted with their towns, while westward their settlements formed a broken line from Friesland to Bordeaux. But in the very heart of their field of operations Britain still lay unconquered, for their descents on its shores had only ended as yet in hard fighting and defeat. And yet it was the winning of Britain which was needed above all to support and widen their conquests to the eastward and westward of it. Had the pirates once become

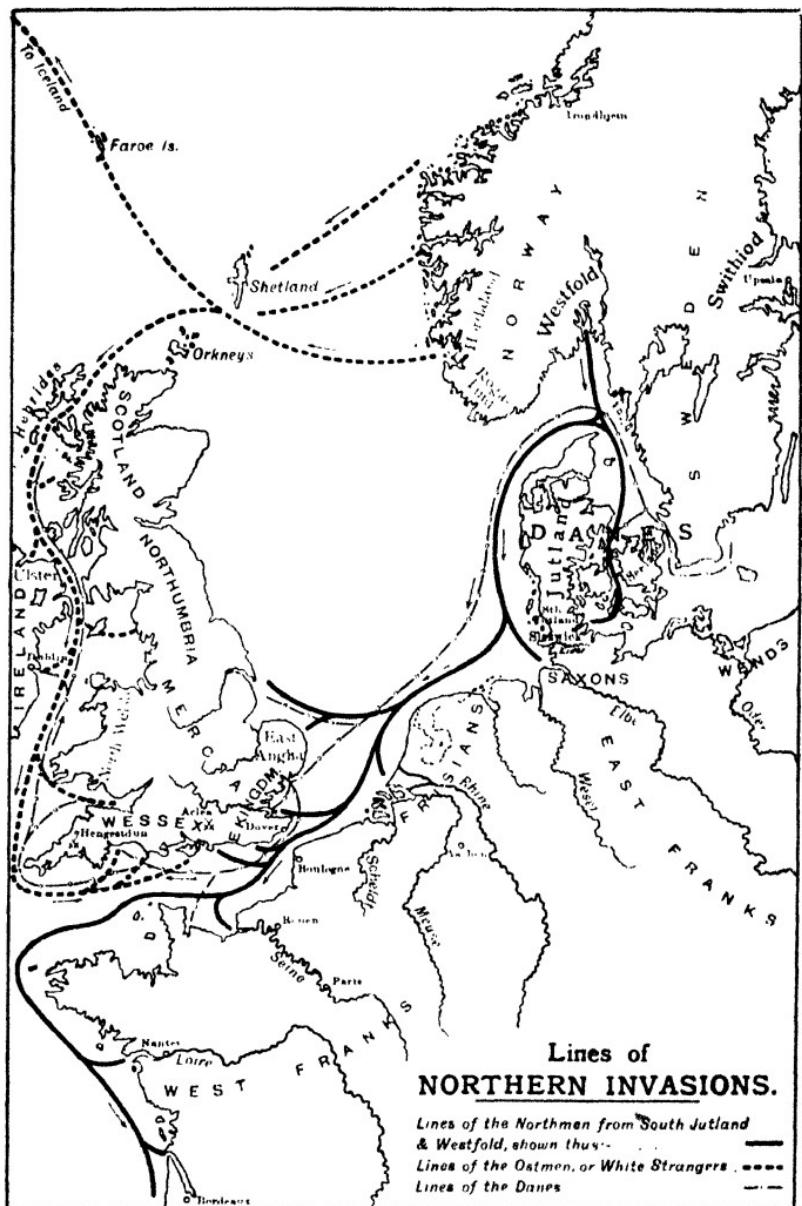
¹ This was under Weland, whom we find before and after this in the Seine and the Somme.—Munch, “*Det Norske Folks Hist.*” pt. iv. pp. 200, 209-10.

² Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 860.

³ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 866. Æthelred's accession marks a new step forward in the consolidation of Wessex. Kent and its dependencies are no longer left detached as a separate under-kingdom; and the king's younger brother Ælfred, who would otherwise have succeeded to the Kentish under-kingdom, becomes “*Secundarius*” (Asser, ed. Wise, pp. 19, 22).

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masters of this central post the face of the west must have changed. Backed by a Scandinavian Britain, their isolated colonies along the Irish coast must have widened into a dominion over all Ireland, while their settlement along the Frankish coast might have grown into a territory stretching over much of Gaul. In a word, Christendom would have seen the rise of a power upon its border which might have changed the fortunes of the western world. Such political considerations indeed can hardly have affected any save the leaders of the northern warriors, but for every warrior there was the ceaseless pressure of the pirates' greed.¹ Now that its abbeys were wrecked there was little booty to be got from Ireland; and even Gaul, wasted as it had been for half a century, was ceasing to be a prey worth much fighting for. Britain however still lay practically untouched. No spoiler's hand had fallen on most of its greater monasteries. No pirate's hand had as yet wrung ransom from its royal hoards. From the opening of Ethelred's reign therefore Britain became the main field of northern attack.

The name, however, under which its assailants were known suggests that a reason for the choice of this new field of warfare, even more powerful than greed or ambition, lay in the appearance of a

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*The coming
of the
Danes.*

¹ Hen. Huntingdon, "Hist. Angl." lib. v. proœm. (ed. Arnold, p. 138) puts this well. "Daci vero terram . . . non obtinere sed priedari studebant, et omnia destruere, non dominari cupiebant."

CHAP. III. new body of assailants.¹ It is now that we first hear of the Danes. The assailants of the Franks had been drawn, as we have seen, from the northmen of South Jutland, those of Ireland from the northmen of Norway. But while these earlier Vikings were doing their work on either side of Britain, another people of the same Scandinavian blood had been taking form along the south-western coast of the present Sweden, and had spread from thence over Zealand with its fellow isles and the north of our Jutland.² These were the men who now came to the front under the name of the Danes; and that they brought a new force and a more national life to the struggle is plain from the character which it immediately took. The petty squadrons which had till now harassed the coast of Britain made way for host; larger than had fallen on any country in the wests while raid and foray were replaced by the regular campaigns of armies who marched to conquer, and whose aim was to settle on the land they had won.

**Character
of their
warfare.**

The numbers in which the Danes drew together showed their consciousness that the work they were taking in hand was work such as the pirates had never taken in hand before. But their numbers are far from explaining the rapidity and completeness of their success in the coming strife.

¹ See Dahlmann, "Gesch. von Dänemark," i. p. 65.

² From Othere's voyage (in Ælfred's "Orosius") which is our earliest historical authority, it is clear that the Danes had reached these limits before the close of the ninth century.

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Making
of the
Danelaw.**

858-878.

The real force of the northern warriors in fact everywhere lay not in numbers but in their superiority as soldiers to the men they met. As assailants indeed their natural advantages were great; for their mastery of the sea gave them along every coast a secure basis of operations, while every river furnished a road for their advance.¹ But the caution and audacity with which they availed themselves of these advantages showed a natural genius for war. To seize a headland or a slip of land at a river mouth, to draw a trench across it and back their trench with earthworks, to haul up their vessels within this camp and assign it a camp-guard, was the prelude to each northern foray; and it was only when their line of retreat was secured that they pushed into the heart of the land.² From the moment of their advance caution seemed exchanged for a

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¹ It is possible that the boats which may be seen making up the Humber with the tide to Goole and the Trent, and which are still known as "keels," may fairly represent to us "keels" of earlier times. Their large, red-brown sails, about seventy feet long, are but a few feet shorter than that of the Vikings' ship of Gokstad; sails of that kind rising above the fringe of reeds and over the long reaches of marsh-land must often have struck terror into the dwellers on the Humble shores. (A. S. G.)

² In their own land, which was penetrated throughout by arms of the sea, no spot lay more than ten miles from the water, and the whole country was thus necessarily exposed to pirate raids, such as those of the Wendish sea-rovers who for a time made a part of the coast of Jutland a mere desert. It was under these conditions that the Danes had learned their special mode of warfare. See Dahlmann's "*Geschichte von Dänemark*," vol. i. pp. 129, 136. (A. S. G.)

CHAP. III. reckless daring. But their daring was far from being reckless. They were in fact the first European warriors who realized the value of quick movement in war. The earliest work of the marauders was to seize horses ; once mounted, they rode pillaging into the heart of the land ; and the speed with which they hurried along baffled all existing means of defence. While alarm beacons were flaming out on hill and headland, while shire-reeve and town-reeve were mustering men for the fyrd, the Dane had already swooped upon abbey and grange. When the shire-host was fairly mustered the foe was back within his camp ; and the country folk wasted their valour upon entrenchments which held them easily at bay till the black boats were shoved off to sea again. Nor was this all. The Danes were as superior to their opponents in tactics as in strategy. An encounter between the shire-levies and the pirates was a struggle of militia with regular soldiers. The Scandinavian war-band was a band of drilled warriors, tried in a hundred forays, knit together by discipline and mutual trust, grouped round a leader of their own choosing, and armed from head to foot. Outnumber them as they might, a host of farmers hurried from their ploughs, armed with what weapons each found to hand, were no match for soldiers such as these.

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Danelaw.
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It was now nearly fourteen years since the

Danes had appeared in the western seas. In 852 a force of these “Dubhgáill” or Dark Strangers made its way to the Irish coast under a sea-king called Olaf the Fair, himself no Dane, but a son of one of the petty rulers of the Norwegian Upland;¹ and after hard fighting with the “Finn-Gaill” or White Strangers, the Norwegians whom it found in possession of the pirate field, the Danes withdrew to return four years after in overwhelming force. From 856 the Vikings about Ireland submitted to Olaf, and his occupation of Dublin made it the centre of the Ostmen.² At the same time Ivar the Boneless, who, whether a son of the mysterious Ragnar Lodbrok or no, was a Skjoldung, or of the kingly race among the Danes, seems from the Irish annals to have been fighting in Munster. But for ten years we see nothing more of these leaders or of their Danish followers; and it is not till 866 that we find them united in an attack on the greater island of Britain. While the Ostmen gathered in a fleet of two hundred vessels under Olaf the Fair, and threw themselves on the Scot-kingdom across the Firth of Forth, a Danish host from Scandinavia itself, under Ivar the Boneless, landed in 866 on the shores of East-Anglia.³ We can

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The Danes
in Ireland.

¹ The Landnáma Book calls him a son of King Ingólf, who came of the stock of Halfdan Whitefoot, King of Upland.

² Todd, “War of Gaedhil and Gaill,” Intr. p. lxxviii.-ix. “Ostmen” was the name given to the pirates settled on the east coast of Ireland. (A. S. G.)

³ The English Chronicle calls it a “micel here,” but names no leader. Æthelweard however calls it “classis tyrannus”

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Danelaw.

858-878.

The Danes
in York.

hardly doubt that this district had been the object of many attacks since the raid on its shores which is recorded more than twenty years before,¹ for the Danes were suffered to winter within its bounds, and it was only in the spring of 867 that they horsed themselves and rode for the north.

Their aim was Northumbria; and as they struck over Mid-Britain for York they found the country torn by the wonted anarchy, and two rivals contending, as of old, for the throne. Though the claimants united in presence of this common danger, their union came too late.² The Danes had seized York at their first arrival, and now fell back before the Northumbrian host to shelter within its defences, which seem still to have consisted of a wooden stockade crowning the mound raised by the last Roman burghers round their widened city.³ The flight and seeming panic of their foes roused the temper of the Northumbrians: they succeeded in breaking through the stockade, and pouring in with its flying defenders, were already masters of the bulk of the town when the Danes turned in a

Igwares"; and the Chronicle names Ingvar and his brother Hubba as leaders of the "here" when it conquered East-Anglia four years later. The lists of after writers are made up of all the names mentioned in the subsequent story. I have omitted all reference to the legend of Ragnar Lodbrok's death, which does not make its appearance for a couple of centuries.

¹ Eng. Chron. a. 838.

² Sim. Durh. "Hist. Dun. Ecc." lib. ii. c. vi.

³ "Non enim tunc adhuc illa civitas firmos et stabilitos muros illis temporibus habebat."—Asser (Wise), p. 18.

BRITAIN NORTH OF THE WASH.

Scale of Miles
0 10 20 30 40 50



rally of despair. From that moment the day was lost. Not only were the two kings slain, but their men were hunted and cut down over all the country-side, till it seemed as if the whole host of Northumbria lay on the fatal field.¹ So overwhelming was the blow that a general terror hindered all further resistance; those who survived the fight "made peace with the Pagans"; and Northumbria sank without further struggle into a tributary kingdom of the Dane.

But the loss of its freedom was only the first result of this terrible overthrow. With freedom went the whole learning and civilization of the North. These, as we have seen, were concentrated in the great abbeys which broke the long wastes from the Humber to the Forth, and whose broad lands had as yet served as refuge for what remained of order and industry in the growing anarchy of the country. But it was mainly the abbeys that roused the pirates' greed; and so unsparing was their attack after the victory at York² that, in what had till now been the main home of English monasticism, monasticism wholly passed away. The doom that had long ago fallen on Jarrow and Wearmouth fell now on all the

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Making
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Ruin of
Northum-
bria.

¹ "Ilic maxima ex parte omnes Northanhymbrenium coeti, occisis duobus regibus, cum multis nobilibus deleti occubuerunt." — Asser (Wise), p. 18. Flor. Wore. gives the date of this battle as Palm Sunday, or March 21, 867.

² Bernicia, however, was not ravaged nor its abbeys destroyed till Halfdene's raid in 875.

CHAP. III. houses of the coast. The abbey of Tynemouth was burned. Streoneshealh, the house of Hild and of Cadmon, vanished so utterly that its very name disappeared, and the little township which took its place in later days bore the Danish name of Whitby. It was the same with the inland houses. Cuthbert's Melrose, Ceadda's Lastingham, no longer broke the silence of Tweeddale or Pickering. If Wilfrid's church at Ripon still remained standing,¹ his abbey perished; and though Archbishop Æthelberht's church still towered over York in the glory of its new stonework, we hear no more of library or school. As a see indeed, York in time profited by the blow. On the general fabric of the church in the north it fell heavily; after the sack of Holy Island the Bishop of Lindisfarne was hunted from refuge to refuge with the relics of Cuthbert;² the Bishop of Lindsey was driven to seek a new home in the south; while the bishopric at Hexham came wholly to an end.³ But the ruin of its fellow sees brought to York a new greatness. As representative of conquered Northumbria, and as the one power which remained permanent amidst the endless revolutions of the pirate state which superseded it, the Primate at York became the religious centre of the North at a moment when the North regained the political

¹ It was destroyed by Eadred in 948.

² Sim. Durh. "Hist. Dunelm. Ecc." lib. ii. c. vi.

³ Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. p. 274.

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individuality it seemed to have lost since the days of Eadberht.¹ The gain of the primacy, however, was a small matter beside the losses of the country at large. The blows of the Dane were aimed with so fatal a precision at the centres of its religious and intellectual life that of the houses which served as the schools, libraries, and universities of Northumbria not one remained standing in the regions over which the conquerors swept. So thoroughly was the work of destruction done that the country where letters and culture had till now found their favourite home remained for centuries to come the rudest and most ignorant part of Britain.

As yet, however, the Danes seem to have had little aim but plunder; and they were hardly masters of Deira when, setting up Ecgberht as an under-king,² they turned to seek new spoil in the south. They seized the passage of the Trent at Nottingham, formed their winter camp there,³ and threatened Mercia in the coming spring. But their way was suddenly barred. At the threat of invasion the Mercian king Burhred, with his Witan, called for aid from his West-Saxon over-lord.⁴ The inaction of Æthelred through the strife in Northumbria shows that in spite of the submission at

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The Danes
threaten
Mercia.

¹ Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. p. 273.

² "Sub suo dominio regem Ecgberhtum præfecerunt," Sim. Durh. "Hist. Dunelm. Ecc." lib. ii. c. vi.

³ Asser (ed. Wise), pp. 19, 20; Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 868.

⁴ Asser (ed. Wise), p. 19.

CHAP. III

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of the
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—
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Dore¹ the northern realm stood practically without the West-Saxon supremacy. But time and the policy of the house of Ecgberht had tightened the bonds which linked central Britain to the West-Saxon crown; and the appeal for help against the Welsh in Æthelwulf's days, as now for help against the Danes, shows that Mercia thoroughly recognized its position as an under-kingdom. The call was heard, and a rapid march brought Æthelred's host to the Danish front at the passage of the Trent. At the head of his joint army of Mercians and West-Saxons the king sought at once to give battle. The Danes however were too good soldiers to be drawn into the field; they fell back on their invariable policy of fighting behind earthworks; and the defences of their camp proved too strong to be broken through, even by the fierce attacks of the English host.² But if Æthelred failed to crush the Dane, he at any rate saved Mercia, for a peace between Danes and Mercians at last parted the combatants. While Æthelred withdrew to Wessex, the Danes fell back baffled to winter at York; and the severity of their losses seems to be shown by their inactivity for the rest of the year.³

When they next quitted York indeed it was to

¹ The Northumbrians had owned Ecgberht as their over-lord at Dore, on the borders of Derbyshire and Yorkshire, in 827. Eng. Chron. a. 827. (A. S. G.)

² Ascer (ed. Wise), p. 20.

³ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 869.

EAST BRITAIN.

Scale of Miles
0 5 10 20 30 40 50

British Names	Icenii
Roman Names	LINDUM
English Names.....	Bedicanford
Modern Names.....	Lincoln



Walker & Boutall sc.

seek another prey than Mercia. It was the wealth of the great Fen abbeys that drew the pirate force, with Ivar and his brother Hubba still at its head, at the close of 869 to an attack on the East-Anglian realm. The Lincolnshire men may, as after tradition held,¹ have thrown themselves across their path ; but if so, it was to be routed in as decisive an overthrow as that of York ; and Peterborough, Crowland, and Ely were sacked and fired while their monks fled or lay slain among the ruins. From the land of the Gyrwas however they suddenly struck for East-Anglia itself ;² and crossing the Devil's Dyke without resistance raised their winter camp at Thetford. The success of their inroad was complete. Brave as their strife with Mercia but a few years before shows them to have been, the East-Engle were utterly defeated in two attacks on the Danish camp ; and the strife ended with the capture of their king, Eadmund, who was brought prisoner before the pirate leaders, bound to a tree, and shot to death with arrows. His martyrdom by the heathen made him the St. Sebastian of English legend ; in later days his figure gleamed from the pictured windows of church after church along the eastern coast, and a stately abbey which bore his name rose over his relics.

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Their
conquest of
East-Anglia.

¹ Ingulf gives plentiful details of this inroad ; but it is impossible to make more than general use of so late a forgery.

² Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 870.

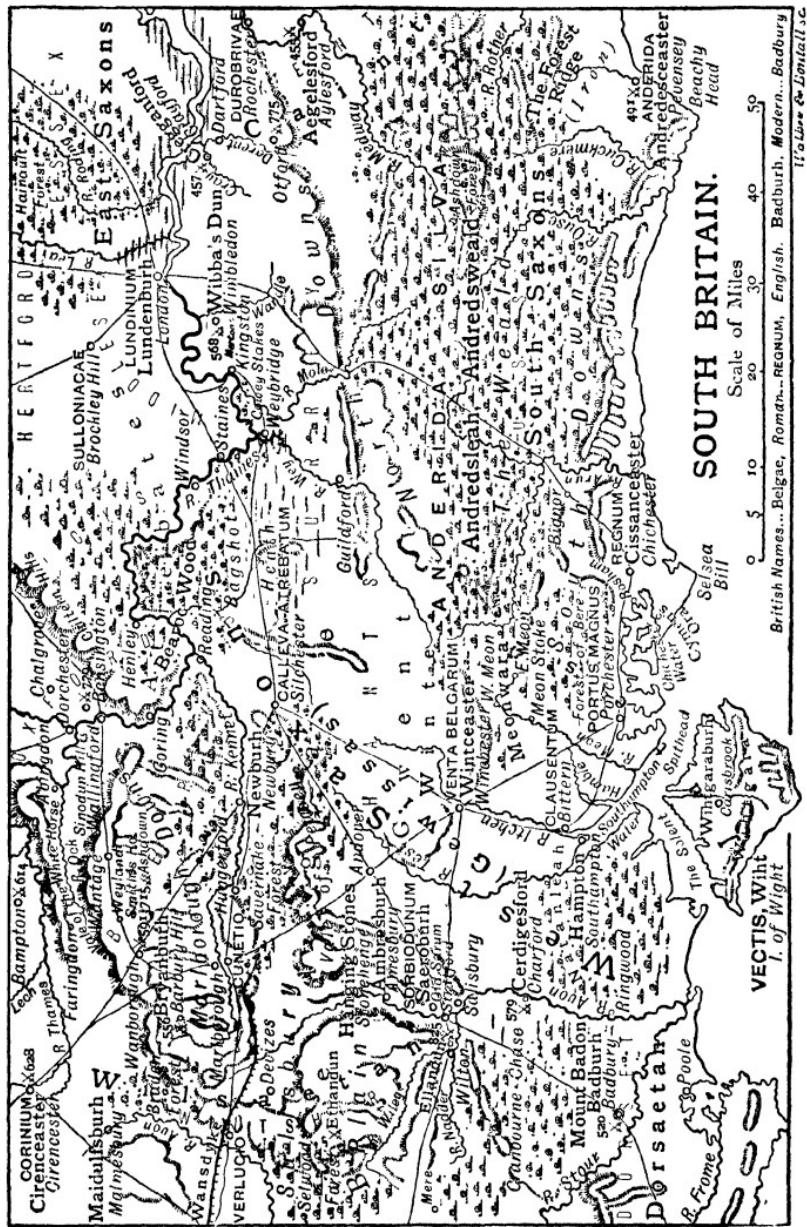
CHAP. III.

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Danelaw.
—
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They attack
Wessex.

How great was the terror stirred by these successive victories was shown in the action of Mercia, for though still free from actual attack, it cowered panic-stricken before the Dane, and by payment of tribute owned his supremacy. This submission brought Wessex face to face with the pirates.

The southern kingdom stood utterly alone, for the work of Ecgberht had been undone at a blow, and but five years' fighting had sufficed to tear England north of Thames from its over-lordship. It is hard to believe that such a revolution can have been wholly wrought by the Danish sword, or that conquests so rapid and so complete as those of Ivar can have been made possible save by the temper of the lands he won. The English realms were still in fact far from owning themselves as an English nation. To Northumbria, to Mercia, to East Anglia, their conquest by the Dane must have seemed little save a transfer from one foreign over-lord to another; and it may be that in each of the three lands there were men who preferred the supremacy of the Dane to the supremacy of the West-Saxon. But the loss of the two kingdoms left Wessex alone before the heathen foe. The time had come when it had to fight not for supremacy but for life. It was the last obstacle in the pirate's path. Elsewhere all had gone well with him. Britain seemed on the point of becoming a Scandinavian land. The Orkney Jarls had conquered Caith-



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ness. The Scot King had become a tributary of the northmen. Northumbria and East Anglia lay in Danish hands, while Mid-Britain owned their supremacy. Nor did the conquest of Wessex promise to be a hard matter. Except in his one march upon Nottingham, Æthelred had done nothing to save his under-kingdoms from the wreck; and when the pirate host set out from East Anglia its work in southern Britain promised to be as easy and complete as its work in the north.

The leader in the new fray was no longer Ragnar's son, Ivar, who seems to have returned to his conquest of Deira, while his brother Hubba had put afresh to sea with a Wiking fleet which we shall find later on in the Bristol Channel; but Guthrum or Gorm, who may (as later genealogies told) have been of kin to the Gormi who was soon to draw the Danish people together into a kingdom of Denmark. With him marched Bægsecg, the Danish King of Bernicia, and a crowd of jarls, Sidroc the Old and Sidroc the Young, Osbern, and Fraena, and Harald among them.¹ In 871 their host sailed up the Thames past London, and seized a tongue of land some half a mile from Reading for its camp.² The country which was to form the scene of the coming struggle was the

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The Danes
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¹ We know these as having fallen at Ashdown. Asser (ed. Wise), p. 23.

² Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 871.

CHAP. III. square of rough forest-country to which the abundance of “bearroc” or box-trees among its woodlands gave the name of Berkshire,¹ a district wedged as it were into an angle which the Thames makes as it runs from its head-waters eastward to Oxford and then turns suddenly to the south to cleave its way through chalk uplands to Reading and the Kennet valley. The bulk of the shire was still wild and thinly peopled, for chalk downs spread over the heart of it from the Thames to Hampshire, and the fertile Kennet valley to the south lay pressed between these uplands and the barren and tangled country about Windsor. But the northern escarpment of the downs looked over the broad reaches of the Vale of White Horse, where the deep clay soil lent itself to tillage where English settlements clustered thickly, and manors of the West-Saxon kings were scattered over the land.

Ælfred. One of these king’s-tuns, that of Wantage,² had been the birthplace of the youngest of *Æthelwulf*’s sons, the *Ætheling* *Ælfred*.³ Young as he still

¹ Asser (ed. Wise), p. 1. “Illa paga quæ nominatur Bearrocsire, quæ paga taliter vocatur a Berroc sylva, ubi buxus abundantissime nascitur.”

² “In villâ regia quæ dicitur Wanadling,” Asser (ed. Wise), p. 1.

³ For *Ælfred*’s life the main authority must be the work attributed to Asser. Its authenticity, which was disputed by Mr. Wright (“Biographia Britannica Literaria”), is admitted by almost all other scholars; though the critical examination of Pauli (“Life of *Ælfred*,” pp. 4-11) shows in how damaged a state the book has come down to us. In spite of all difficulties

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was, *Ælfred's* life had been a stirring and eventful one. He was but four years old when he was sent with a company of nobles to Rome,¹ on an embassy which paved the way for *Æthelwulf's* own visit two years later, and he returned to the imperial city in his father's train. The boy's long stay there, as well as at the Frankish court, left a mark on his mind which we can trace through all his after life. English as *Ælfred* was to the core, his international temper, his freedom from a narrow insularism, his sense of the common interests and brotherhood of Christian nations, pointed back to the childish days when he looked on the wonders of Rome or listened to the scholars and statesmen who thronged the court of Charles the Bald. There was little, as we have seen, to break the peace of the land as the *Ætheling* grew to manhood save passing raids of the northmen from Gaul, and the vigour and restlessness of the boy's temper found no outlet for itself but in the chase. But the thirst for knowledge was already quickening within him. It was one of the bitter regrets of his after life that at this time, when he

however "no theory of the authorship or date of the work," says Mr. Earle ("Parallel Chronicles," Intr. p. lvi.), "has ever been proposed which on the whole meets the facts of the case better than that set forth in the book itself, that it was written in 893." Asser has embodied the whole contents of the existing chronicle from 851 to 887, a point at which there are good grounds for believing the Chronicle, as *Ælfred* found it, to have ended. This coincidence "is strongly in favour of the professed date."

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 853.

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CHAP. III. • had leisure and will to learn, he could find no man to teach him. But what he could learn he learned. The love of English verse which never left him dated from these earlier days. It was a book of English songs which (if we accept the story in spite of its difficulties)¹ his mother promised to the first of her sons who learned to read it. The beauty of its letters caught *Ælfred's* eye, and seizing the book from his mother's hand, he sought a master who repeated it to him till the boy's memory enabled him to recite its poems by heart.²

His political position.

As yet however his temper had little political importance; for he stood far from the throne. But death was already paving his way to it. *Æthelbald* enjoyed the crown but two years after his father's death; and only six years later the death of *Æthelberht* in 866, and the accession of his one surviving brother *Æthelred*, set *Ælfred* next in the accepted order of succession to the West-Saxon throne. The stress of events too called him now to sterner studies than those of letters, for though the consolidation of the Eastern Kingdom with the rest of the monarchy hindered him from becoming its under-king, he held an office, that of *Secundarius*, in which we may perhaps see a germ of the later Justiciarship; and it was in discharge of these new duties that he marched at nineteen with his brother to the Trent.

¹ See Pauli's criticisms, "Life of *Ælfred*," p. 51.

² *Asser* (ed. Wise), p. 16.

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The policy of Ecgberht's house aimed at a close union with Central Britain: a sister of Ælfred's was already wife of the Mercian king; and in Ælfred's union at this moment with the daughter of an ealdorman of the Gainas, we see a trace of the same policy which brought about in later days the marriage of his own daughter with the Mercian Æthelred.¹ But the marriage feast was roughly broken up, for the young husband was seized in the midst of it with a disease, probably that of epilepsy, from which he was never afterwards to be wholly free. Neither sickness nor marriage however held Ælfred back from the field; he fought in the West-Saxon ranks at Nottingham;² and now that the Dane attacked his own Wessex he led the van of his brother's host.

It may have been to save the home of his childhood that the young Ætheling fought so stoutly in the after fights. But king and people fought as stoutly as Ælfred himself, for now that they were attacked on their own ground the West Saxons turned fiercely at bay. We have seen how from the first the Gwent had been screened from invasion by the impenetrable barriers that guarded it on every side, and how the hosts of its earlier assailants had fallen back before steeps such as those of Wanborough and Ashdown. A far different fortune however seemed to await the Danes. They had no sooner reached Reading

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Success of
the Danes.

¹ Asser (ed. Wise), p. 59.

² Eng. Chron. a. 868.

CHAP. III. than one of their marauding parties was cut to pieces by a force hastily gathered under the ealdorman of the district ; and the check gave *Æthelred* and his brother time to hurry to the field ;¹ but though the king at once assailed the camp which the pirates had formed by running an entrenchment from the Kennet to the Thames, a desperate fight ended in his repulse, and the defeat threw open Wessex to the invaders. As the beaten Englishmen fell back along the Thames the pirates pushed rapidly by the ancient track known as the Ridgeway along the edge of the upland which looks over the Vale of White Horse, till on the height of Ashdown they threw up entrenchments and again encamped.²

The battle of Ashdown. The march of the Danes showed their genius for war. They had in fact thrown themselves on their enemy's rear, and not only cut off his communications with the Gwent but turned its very escarpments against him, for it was *Æthelred* and not the Danes that had to storm the heights of Ashdown in the coming struggle. From such a post indeed all Wessex lay at the mercy of the invaders. But they had still to fight for it ; for neither *Æthelred* nor *Ælfred* were men to give up hope at a single blow. Four days after the fight at Reading the English army, reinforced probably by the men of Wantage and the neighbourhood,

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 871 ; Asser (ed. Wise), p. 21.

² Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 871.

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stood again face to face with its foes, and *Ælfred*, who led the advance, at once attacked them.¹ Posted, however, as they were on a hill covered with thick brushwood and sheltered by their usual entrenchments, the Danes held the *Ætheling*'s troops stoutly at bay; and though message after message called *Æthelred* to his aid the king refused to march till the mass he was hearing was done. "God first and man after," *Æthelred* answered his brother's cry; and *Ælfred* could only save his men from utter rout by charging again and again "like a wild boar" up the slope. The king however showed a cool judgment in his delay, for his men were well in hand before he moved; and the general advance of his army at last cleared the fatal hill. The fight raged fiercest round a stunted thorn-tree which men in after days noted curiously ("I have seen it with my own eyes," says *Asser*), and here with loud shouts Dane and Englishman battled hard. But the shouts were hushed at last. The day went for *Æthelred*. King *Bægsecg* fell beneath the sword of the king himself; and five pirate Jarls lay among the corpses which were heaped upon the field.²

But routed as it was, *Guthrum*'s host sought shelter in the camp at Reading, and its entrenchments again held the brothers at bay. The West

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Ælfred
becomes
king.¹ *Asser* (ed. Wise), pp. 22, 23.² *Eng. Chron.* (Winch.), a. 871.

CHAP. III. Saxons still indeed kept their mastery in the field, beating back the Danes as they tried a new dash along the line of the Kennet, and holding them in check at Basing when with forces strengthened by the arrival of fresh troops from the Thames they struck southward for Hampshire. But the camp at Reading remained impregnable, and every hour of delay told fatally against *Aethelred*. Already weakened by these fierce encounters, the West-Saxon leader was hampered above all by the difficulty of holding his levies together. Men called from farm and field and looking for support to the rations they brought with them were eager to fight and go home ; while the Danes were constantly reinforced by fresh comers, and spurred to new efforts by the need of procuring supplies from the country they won. A change in the relative weight of the two armies at last showed itself, for a new raid upon Surrey brought the pirates better luck than its predecessors ; and after a brave fight at Merton, in which their king was mortally wounded, the West Saxons drew off, beaten from the field.¹ When *Aethelred*'s death in April² added its gloom to the gloom of defeat, and *Aelfred* took his place on the throne, the young king (he numbered but two and twenty years) stood almost alone in front of the enemy, for at

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 871.

² Flor. of Worc. dates it three weeks after Easter, which, in 871, would make it April 23.

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the news of his brother's death the English levies
had broken up and gone home.

At this very hour a large fleet of Danes pushed up Thames to join their fellows at Reading, and Ælfred was forced to hurry from his brother's grave at Wimborne with what men he could muster to meet a fresh advance of the foe. But with such forces little could be done to check their march. They seem already to have entered the Gwent and to have encamped at Wilton, the early "tun" to which our Wiltshire owes its name, before Ælfred could meet them;¹ and a desperate attack which the young king made on them there was roughly beaten off. A succession of petty defeats forced Ælfred at last to a shameful truce; and at the counsel of his Witan he bought with hard money the withdrawal of the Danes from the land. The shame was hard to bear, for though bargains of this sort had been common enough in Ireland and Gaul, a purchased peace had as yet scarcely been known among Englishmen; and the distress of Ælfred may be seen in a vow of alms to the holy places in Rome and even in far-off India for deliverance from his foes, which marked this dark hour of his history.² But if the gold

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The Danes
master
Mercia.

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 871; Asser (ed. Wise), p. 25.

² Eng. Chron. (Canterbury), a. 883. "This year Sighelm and Æthelstan carried to Rome the alms which the king vowed to send thither, and also to India, to St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew, when they sat down against the army at London." The Danish "here" retired after the truce to winter at London

CHAP. III. won a respite for Wessex, it left the pirates free to complete their work in the centre of the island. Granting peace, no doubt on terms of tribute, to the ruler of Mid-Britain, the host after a year spent in Northumbria returned to its camp at Torksey in Lincolnshire to gather fresh forces for a new campaign ;¹ then, in the spring of 874, the Danes burst upon Mercia. We hear of no resistance. King Burhred fled over sea without striking a blow to find refuge and a grave at Rome ; while his conquerors, setting up a puppet king, Ceolwulf, in his room, took oath of vassalage from him and his subjects, and wintered at Repton, sacking and firing the great abbey which served as the burial-place of the Mercian kings.²

**Division of
the
Danish host.** Their mastery of central Britain however only served to give the Danes a firmer base from which to complete their conquest of the island, both in north and south. With the spring of 875 their force broke asunder ; one part of it with Halfdene at its head marching northward to the Tyne to

(Eng. Chron. a. 872) ; but we have no account of Ælfred's sitting down against them ; and as this is a late copy of the Chronicle, its entry may be a mere blunder for Asser's entry, "Paganorum exercitus Lundoniam adiit et ibi hiemavit," or rather Huntingdon's copy of this, "quando hostilis exercitus hiemavit apud Lundoniam."

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 873.

² Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 874 ; Asser (ed. Wise), p. 26. Æthelweard, a. 872. "Myrcii confirmant cum eis foederis pactum stipendiaque statuunt." From the Chronicle it seems that the Danes took part of Mercia, leaving part to Ceolwulf. Is this the beginning of the division into Danish and English Mercia ?

complete the reduction of Bernicia.¹ The aim of the pirates still remained mainly that of plunder, and the religious houses which had escaped till now fell in this fiercer storm. Coldingham, the house of Ebbe, was burnt to the ground. Bishop Eardulf was driven from Lindisfarne, carrying with him the body of Cuthbert as his chiefest treasure, to wander with it for years from one hiding-place to another.² When little remained to glean from the wasted land Halfdene led his men through Cumbria, where Carlisle was entirely destroyed, and on through Strath-Clyde³ to the north, where the Scot king Constantine was battling for life against Thorstein, a son of Olaf the Fair, and the Norwegian Jarl Sigurd who had now established himself in the Orkneys. Thorstein and Sigurd overran the northern parts of the realm while Halfdene advanced from the south, till the Scots, pressed between the two pirate hosts, bought peace for the moment by the cession of Caithness. But while one portion of the host was thus busy beyond the Humber, Guthrum was leading the other half from their winter-quarters at Repton to Cambridge to prepare

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¹ Eng. Chron. a. 875.

² Sim. Durh. "Gest. Reg." a. 875.

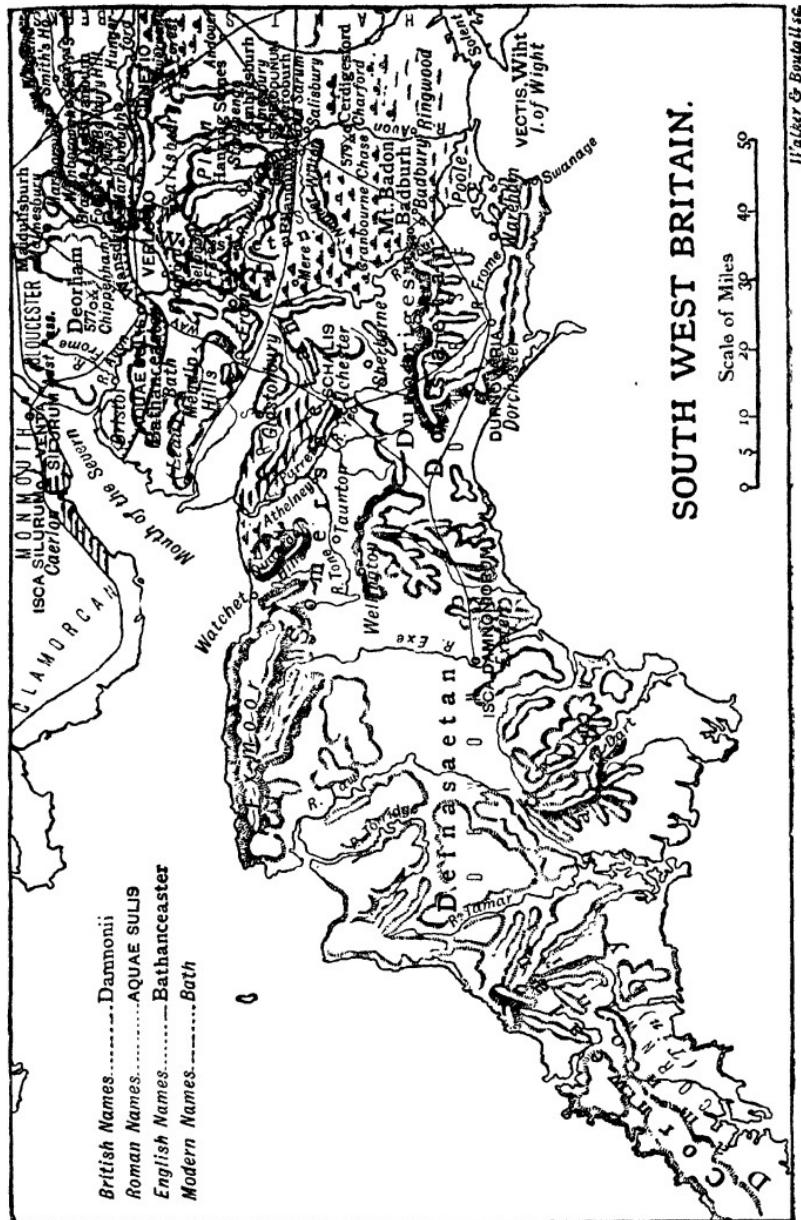
³ "Pictos atque Stretduccenses depopulati sunt," Sim. Durh. "He made raids on the Picts and the Strath-Clyde Wealhs," Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 875. "Inducunt Pihiis bellum Cumbrisque," Æthelweard, a. 875, lib. iv. c. 3. Skene notes this as "the first appearance of the term of Cumbri or Cumbrians, as applied to the Britons of Strath-Clyde."

CHAP. III. for a final onset upon Wessex. The greatness of the contest had now drawn to Britain the whole strength of the northmen. Ireland won a long rest as its Ostmen flocked to join their brethren over the sea ; and the force of the pirates in Gaul was so weakened that Charles was able to drive them from their stronghold at Angers. But the weakness of the pirates to east and west only pointed to a general concentration of their force upon Britain, and it was with a host swollen by reinforcements from every quarter that Guthrum in 876 set sail for the south.¹

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Guthrum's second attack on Wessex. Ælfred had equipped a few ships which served to beat off some smaller parties that attacked the coast, but the little squadron was helpless to meet such a fleet as now put out from the harbours of East Anglia. Coasting by Dover, Guthrum made like the earlier marauders for the Dorset coast, and seized a neck of land near Wareham between the Piddle and the Frome for his camp. Ælfred at once marched on these lines ; but they were too strong to storm ; and gold, we can hardly doubt, again bought a treaty in which the pirates swore on every relic that could be gathered as well as on their own Odin's ring, a sacred bracelet smeared with the blood of beasts offered at the god's altar, to quit the king's land. Ælfred's hold was no sooner loosened however than half of the northern host took horse and, striking across

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 875 ; Asser (ed. Wise), p. 27.



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CHAP. III. Devonshire, while the main body of the northern host again crossed the Avon and pushed by a swift and secret march as far as Chippenham.¹ The surprise of Wessex was complete. The Danes were in the heart of the Gwent before tidings of their advance could call either king or people to arms, and the whole district east of the Selwood lay at their mercy. To gather the fyrd of Hampshire or Wilts or Berkshire in face of the pirates was impossible. Their activity made them masters of the land ; “many of the folk they drove beyond sea” over the Bristol Channel, “and the greater part of the rest they forced to obey them.”² Ælfred alone remained untouched by the terror about him. Falling back through the Selwood on the westernmost fragment of Wessex, the land of the Somersætas and Defn-sætas, he seems even there to have found his efforts to gather a force baffled for a while by civil strife ;³ and the band which still followed the king made its way with difficulty to the marshes that occupied the heart of Somersetshire.⁴ From Langport to the site of the later Bridgewater, the country between Polden Hill and the Quantocks was little more than a vast morass drained by the deep channel of the Parret. The local names of

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 878 ; Asser (ed. Wise), p. 30.

² Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 878.

³ “Ælfredo,” says Æthelweard, a. 886, “quem ingenio, quem occursu, non superaverat civilis discordia sœva.”

⁴ Asser (ed. Wise), p. 30.

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the district, Sedgemoor, on whose half-reclaimed flats Monmouth was to meet his doom, the “zoys” or rises crowned nowadays with marsh-villages, such as Chedzoy and Middlezoy, preserve a record of the flood-drowned fen in which Ælfred sought shelter. In the midst of it, at a point where the Tone flowing northwards from Taunton strikes the Parret, lies Athelney, a low lift of ground some two acres in extent, girded in by almost impassable fen-lands. It was at Athelney that the king threw up a fort and waited for brighter days.¹

A jewel of blue enamel inclosed in a setting of gold with the words round it “Ælfred had me wrought” was found here in the seventeenth century, and still recalls the memories of this gallant stand. It was only later legend² that changed it into a solitary flight, as it turned the three months of Ælfred’s stay in this fastness into three years of hiding. The three months were in fact months of active preparation for a new struggle. Athelney was a position from which Ælfred could watch closely the movements of his foes, and with the first burst of spring he found himself ready to attack them. Whatever disunion may have thwarted him before must now have been hushed, for the fyrd of Devonshire gathered round its Ealdorman Odda, and falling suddenly

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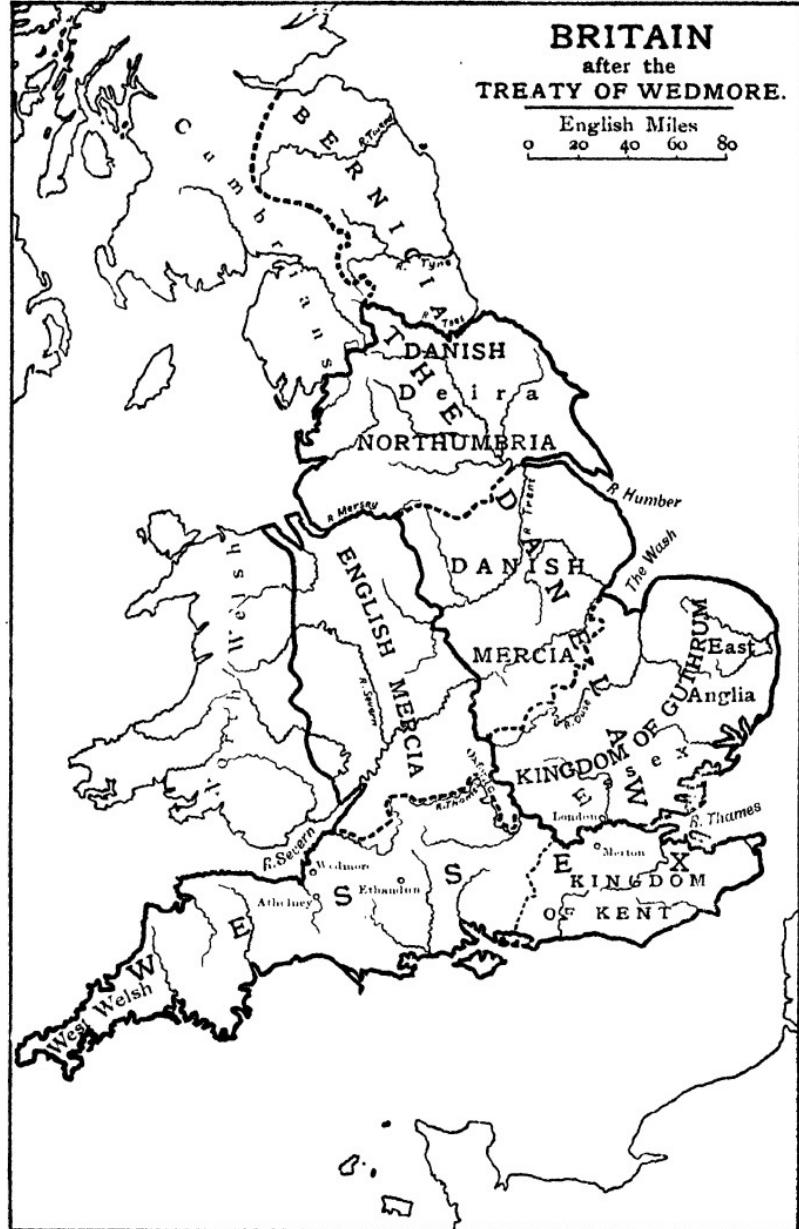
Defeat of
the Danes.

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 878; Asser (ed. Wise), p. 33.

² The legend of St. Neot, written at the end of the tenth century, of which fragments break our actual text of Asser.

BRITAIN
after the
TREATY OF WEDMORE.

English Miles
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changed. Dread as *Ælfred* might the sword that hung over him, the Danes themselves were as yet in no mood to renew their attack upon Wessex; and with the abandonment of this attack not only was all hope of winning Britain as a whole abandoned, but all chance of making it a secure base and starting-point for wider Scandinavian conquests passed away.

The tide of invasion in fact had turned; and Europe felt that it had turned. The struggle with the West Saxons had been marked by a general pause in the operations of the pirates elsewhere, for their number was so small in relation to the area over which they fought that their concentration for any great struggle in one quarter meant their weakening and retreat in another. It is clear from the general aspect of the war in Gaul, that the conquest of the Danelaw and the absorption of a large force in its settlement had already weakened the strength of the northern onset upon the Franks. The courage of the peoples across the Channel rose as the pressure of the northmen became lighter; and we see in every quarter a growing resistance to the invaders. But this resistance took a new vigour when the Danes were thrown back from Wessex. The spell of terror was broken. Nowhere had the attack been so resolute; nowhere had the forces of the pirates been so great; nowhere had their campaigns been conducted on so steady and

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Its effect
on Europe.

CHAP. III. regular a plan; nowhere had they so nearly reached the verge of success. And nowhere had they so utterly failed. The ease and completeness with which the invaders had won the bulk of Britain only brought out in stronger relief the completeness of their repulse from the south.

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Great however as were the results of Ælfred's victory, the fact remained that the bulk of Britain lay still in Danish hands. If we look at it in its relation to England as a whole, the treaty of Wedmore was the acknowledgment of a great defeat. Bravely as the house of Ecgberht had fought, the work of Ecgberht was undone. The dominion which he had built up was wrecked like the dominion of the Karolings; and for the moment it seemed yet more completely wrecked. The blows of the northmen had fallen indeed as heavily on the one dominion as on the other; but in the Karolingian Empire their settlements were scattered and few, nor had they any importance save in furthering the tendency of its various peoples to fall apart into their old isolation. In England, on the other hand, the Danes had won the bulk of the land for their own. Beaten as they were from Wessex, all northern, all eastern, and a good half of central Britain remained Scandinavian ground. The settlements of the northmen in Frankland, those in Friesland or on the Loire, even the more permanent Norman settlements at a later time on the Seine, were too

small to sway in other than indirect ways the fortunes of the states across the Channel. But in Britain the Danish conquests outdid in extent and population what was left to the English king, and the realm of Ælfred saw across Watling Street a rival whose power was equal to, or even greater than, its own.

Nor was this conquest a mere work of the sword. With the change of masters went a social revolution, for over the whole space from the Thames to the Tees the Danes throughout Ælfred's day were settling down on the conquered soil. Their first settlement was in Deira, in the area occupied by the present Yorkshire. Though their victory at York had left this district in their hands as early as the spring of 868, they contented themselves for the next seven years with the exaction of tribute from an under-king, Ecgberht, whom they set over it, while they mastered East-Anglia and crushed Mid-Britain, and made their first onset on Wessex. But in 875, while Guthrum prepared to renew the attack on Ælfred, Halfdene with a portion of the Danish army at Repton marched northward into Northumbria. It is possible that he was drawn there by a rising of the country in which Ecgberht had been driven from the throne and Ricsig set as under-king in his place; but if so the death of Ricsig marks the close of this rising, and Halfdene marched unopposed to the Tyne. From his winter-camp

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The Danes
in North-
umbria.

CHAP. III. there he "subdued the land and oft-times spoiled the Picts and the Strathclyde Wealhs."¹ With the spring of 876 however, while Guthrum and Ælfred were busy with the siege of Wareham, he fell back from Bernicia to the south, and "parted" among his men "the lands of Northumbria. Thenceforth," adds the chronicler, "they went on ploughing and tilling them."² That this "deal" or division of the land did not, in spite of Halfdene's conquests on the Tyne, extend to Bernicia we know from the fact that hardly a trace of Danish settlement can be found north of the Tees.³ But the names of the towns and villages of Deira show us in how systematic a way southern Northumbria was parted among its conquerors. The change seems to have been much the same as that which followed the conquest of the Normans. The English population was not displaced, but the lordship of the soil was transferred to the conqueror. The settlers formed a new aristocracy, while the older nobles fell to a lower position; for throughout Deira the life of an English thegn was priced at but half the value of the life of a northern "hold."

Their settlements. Some of the new settlements can be easily traced through the termination "by," a Scandinavian equivalent for the English "tun" or "ham," while others may be less certainly distinguished

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 875.

² *Ibid.* 876.

³ Taylor, "Words and Places," p. 112.

by their endings in "thwaite" or "dale;" and in each of the Ridings of Yorkshire we still find at least a hundred local names of this Danish type. Where they cluster most thickly is in the dales that break the wild tract of moorland along the coast from Whitby to the Tees valley, to which the new-comers gave the name of Cliff-land or Cleveland. Around Whitby itself, the "Whitby" of the northern settlers, the little town that rose on either side its river-mouth beneath the height on which the ruins of Streoneshealh, the home of Hild and Cadmon, stood blackened and desolate, the country is thickly dotted with northern names. Memories of the pirate faith, of Balder and of Thor, meet us in Baldersby¹ or Thornaby as in the lost name of Presteby or Priest's town; other hamlets give us the names of the warriors themselves as they turned to "plough and till," Beorn and Ailward, Grim and Aswulf, Orm and Tol, Thorald and Swein.² A few names of far greater interest hint how race distinctions still perpetuated themselves in the group of little townships. Three Englebys or Inglebys and two Normanbys tell how here and there lords of the old Engle race still remained on a level with the conquerors, or how Northmen or Norwegians who had joined in the fighting had their share in the

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¹ Now Baldby Fields.

² Barnby, Ellerby, Grimsby, Aislaby (Asulvesbi), Ormsby, Tolesby, Swainby, Thoraldby.

CHAP. III. spoil.¹ At the other extremity of this district, in the valley of the Tees, a curious coincidence almost enables us to detect the spot from which the settlers came. On the coast of South Jutland we find two towns in close neighbourhood, Middleburg and Aarhus; while in the Tees valley Middlesborough is as closely neighboured by its "Aarhusum" or Airsome. It is hardly possible not to believe that the great iron-mart of Cleveland must look for its mother-city to the little Jutish township, as the Boston of the New World looks for its mother-city to the Boston of the Old.²

Their trade. Cleveland remained for centuries to come a thoroughly Scandinavian district; of its twenty-seven lords in Domesday, twenty-three still bore distinctively Danish names, and names of a like character seem at a yet later time to have prevailed even among its serfs.³ What drew settlers so thickly there was no doubt the neighbourhood of the sea; as ease of access from the sea drew them to the valley of the Ouse. The swift tide up the Humber, the "Higra" as it came to be called from the sea god Ægir, carried the northern boats past

¹ Atkinson, "Glossary of Cleveland Dialect," Introd. xiv. etc. Even the judicial institutions of the settlers survive in "Thingwall," a spot by Whitby, which has vanished from the modern map, but whose name Mr. Atkinson discovers in a "Memorial of Benefactions to Whitby Abbey" as "Thingvala."

² Atkinson, "Cleveland Dialect," Introd. p. xiii. note. The South Jutland "Hjardum" probably finds a like successor in the Cleveland "Yarm" or "Yarum."

³ Atkinson, "Cleveland Dialect," Introd. pp. xx. xxi.

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the marshes of Holderness to the trading port, the “Caupmanna-thorpe” or Cheapman’s Thorpe, established by the new-comers to the south of York.¹ Like all men of the north the pirates were as keen traders as they were hard fighters ;² their very kings were traffickers. Biorn, Harald Fair-hair’s son, was “Biorn the Merchant,” and St. Olaf was a partner in the trade ventures of his Jarls. The main end of their raids was to gather slaves for the slave-mart ;³ but they brought with them the furs, oils, skins, and eider-down of their northern lands to barter for the wares of the south. Their settlements along the north coast were as much markets as pirate-holds ; and York, which from this time became more and more a Danish city, was thronged at the close of a century with Danish

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¹ Taylor, “Words and Places,” p. 254. “Caupmansthorpe near York . . . the form of the word shows us that here the Danish traders resided just as those of Saxon blood dwelt together at Chapmanslade.”

² Skiringsal in the Wik was now the centre of northern trade. “The Sleswig ships brought to it German, Wendish, Prussian, Russian, Greek, and Eastern wares, as well as merchants and adventurers from these lands. In Skiringsal indeed the Halgolander might be seen driving bargains with the Prussian, the Trondheimer with the Saxon and the Wend, the Söndmöringer with the Dane and the Swede ; beside the walrus-skins and furs from the north one might see amber from Prussia, costly stuffs from Greece and the East, Byzantine and Arabian coins and northern rings, while the harbour lay full of big and little ships of varied build, among which the kingly long-ship was distinguished not only by its size but by its magnificence.”—Munch, “Det Norske Folks Historie” (Germ. transl.), pt. iv. p. 141.

³ We see the actual working of this slave-trade in Olaf Trygvasson’s story. He was captured in his childhood, “with his mother Astrid and his foster-father, Thorolf, by an Esthonian

CHAP. III. merchants and had become the centre of a thriving trade with the north. The new comers have left their mark in some of its local names : the street leading to its eastern outlet is still Guthrum's Gate ; and the church of St. Olave reminds us how at the eve of the Norman Conquest the Danish population had spread to the suburbs of the town.

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Over the central vale, from York to Catterick, we find the "byes" planted as was naturally the case pretty thickly, with a "Balderby" among them that suggests how the northern myths were settling on English soil with the northern marauders ; and if the eastern wolds present few traces of their homes, they are frequent along the western moors. Of the life or institutions however of these settlers we know little, for from the moment of their settlement to the conquest of the Norman, northern England is for two hundred years all but hidden from our view. The division of Deira into three Trithings, or Ridings, which probably dates from this time, may answer in some degree to older divisions ; the East Riding

wiking, as they were crossing the sea from Sweden on their way to Novgorod, and were divided among the crew and sold. An Esthonian called Klerkon got Olaf and Thorolf for his share of the booty, but Astrid was separated from her son Olaf, then only three years old. Klerkon thought Thorolf too old for a slave, and that no work could be got out of him to repay his food, and therefore killed him, but sold the boy to a man called Klærk for a goat. A peasant called Reas bought him from Klærk for a good cloak, and he remained in slavery till he was recognized by his uncle."—Laing, "Sea Kings of Norway," Introd. vol. i. p. 96.

or district of the wolds to an earlier Deira of the English conquerors which seems in later times to have retained some sort of existence as an under-kingdom, while the bounds of the West Riding roughly correspond with those of Elmet, as Eadwine added it to his Northumbrian realm. But the arrangement by which the Trithings were linked together, the adjustment of their boundaries so that all three met in York itself, had clearly a distinct political end, and marks a time—such as that of the Danish kings—in which York was the seat and capital of the central power. The division of the Trithings into Wapentakes, which answer here to the Hundreds of the south, is probably of the same date. In England, as in Iceland, the word may have been originally used for the closing of the district-court, when the suitors again took up the weapons they had laid aside at its opening, and have finally extended to the district itself.¹ The change of the English name “moot” for the gathering of the freemen in township or wapentake into the Scandinavian “thing” or “ting,” a change recorded, as we have seen, by local designations, is no less significant of the social revolution which passed over the north with the coming of the Dane.

The year after Halfdene’s parting of Deira among his followers saw another portion of the Danish host settle in Mid-Britain. While Ælfred

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¹ Stubbs, “Const. Hist.” i. 109.

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CHAP. III. was still in the midst of his struggle with the Danes about Exeter, "in the harvest-tide of 877, the Here went into Mercia, and some of it they parted, and some they handed over to Ceolwulf"
 —————
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who till now had served as their under-king for the whole.¹ The portion they took for themselves is for the most part marked by the presence in it of their Danish names. "Byes" extend to the very borders of Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, and Northamptonshire, while from the rest of Mercia they are almost wholly absent.² It was this western half of the older kingdom, our Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, and Oxfordshire, which remained under Ceolwulf's rule,³ and to which from this time the name of Mercia is confined, while the eastern or Danish half was known, at

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 877. For Ceolwulf see *ib.* a. 874. "That same year they gave the Mercian kingdom to the keeping of Ceolwulf, an unwise thegn of the king" (Burhred, who had fled to die at Rome), "and he swore oaths to them, and delivered hostages to them that it should be ready for them on whatever day they would have it, and that he would be ready both in his own person and with all who would follow him for the behoof of the army."

² The country about Buckingham however, which formed the southern bound of the "Five Boroughs," has no "byes." Those about Wirral in Cheshire are an exception which I shall have to notice later on. We find too "byes" extending some few miles into our Warwickshire. I shall afterwards explain why I set aside the notion of Watling Street being the boundary of Danish Mercia.

³ In 896 we find three ealdormen among the Witan of this part of Mercia. Cod. Dip. No. 1073. The number in the undivided Mercian realm seems to have been five.

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any rate in later days, as the district of the Five Boroughs,¹ Derby, whose name superseded the older English “Northweorthig,” Leicester, Lincoln, Stamford, and Nottingham. Politically this state differed widely from Danish Northumbria. While Northumbria was an organized kingdom under the stock of Ingvar or Ivar, with a definite centre at York and a general administrative division into Trithings and Wapentakes, the independence of the Five Boroughs was unfettered by any semblance of kingly rule. Their name suggests some sort of confederacy; and it is possible that a common “Thing” may have existed for the whole district; but each of the Boroughs seems to have had its own Jarl, and Here or army, while (if we may judge from the instance of Lincoln and Stamford) the internal rule of each was in the hands of twelve hereditary “law-men.” There was a like difference in local organization. In the country about Lincoln we find both Trithings and Wapentakes, as on the other side the Humber, but there is no trace of the Trithing in the territory of the four other Boroughs. The distribution of settlers over this midland Danelaw was as varied as their forms of rule. They lay thickest in the Lindsey uplands, where the lands seem to have been treated throughout as conquered country, and to have

¹ The name first occurs in the Song of Eadmund, Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 941.

CHAP. III. been parted among the conquerors by the rude rope-measurement of the time. Lincolnshire indeed contains as many names of northern settlements as the whole of Yorkshire;¹ and its

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little port of Grimsby, whose muddy shores were thronged with traders from Norway and the Orkneys, came at last to rival York in commercial activity.² In the districts of the other four towns the names of such settlements are far less numerous; it is only in Leicestershire indeed that we find anything like the settlements of the north.³

**The Danes
in East
Anglia.**

In East Anglia the northern colonization was of a yet weaker sort than in Mid-Britain. Although this district had been in Danish hands since the fall of Eadmund in 870, its real settlement dated ten years later, when Guthrum led back his army from Wessex after the Frith or Peace of Wedmore. In 880 “the army went from Cirencester to East

¹ Isaac Taylor, “Words and Places,” p. 122, numbers some three hundred.

² “When Kali was fifteen winters old, he went with some merchants to England, taking with him a good cargo of merchandise. They went to a trading place called Grimsby. There was a great number of people from Norway, as well as from the Orkneys, Scotland, and the Sudreyar. . . . Then he, Kali, made a stanza—

“Unpleasantly we have been wading
In the mud a weary five weeks ;
Dirt indeed we had in plenty
While we lay in Grimsby harbour.”

Anderson, “Orkneyinga Saga,” pp. 75-6.

This however was in the twelfth century.

³ In Leicestershire Taylor finds one hundred such names, in Northampton and Notts fifty each, in Derby about a dozen. —“Words and Places,” p. 122.

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Anglia, and settled the land, and parted it among them.”¹ Guthrum’s realm, however, included far more than East Anglia itself. The after war of 886 and the frith that followed it show that Essex was detached from the Eastern or Kentish kingdom, to which it had belonged since Ecgberht’s day, and brought back to its old dependence on East Anglia. With Essex passed its chief city, London, now wasted by pillage and fires, but soon to regain its trading activity in Danish hands, and whose subject territory carried Guthrum’s rule along the valley of the Thames as far as the Chilterns and the district attached to Oxford, which now became a border-town of English Mercia. To the north too Guthrum seems to have wielded the old East-Anglian supremacy over the southern districts of the Fen. In extent therefore his kingdom was fully equal to either of the two rival states of the Danelaw. But its character was far less northern. The bulk of the warrior-settlers may have already found homes on the Ouse or the Trent; it is certain at any rate that in East Anglia their settlements were few. The “byes” of Norfolk and Suffolk lie clustered for the most part round the mouth of the Yare; and this was probably the one part of his district where distinct pirate communities existed; throughout the rest of it the Danes must simply have quartered themselves on their English subjects. In the dependent districts to north and south they ↘

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 880.

CHAP. III. seem rather to have clustered in town-centres, such as Colchester and Bedford, or Huntingdon and Cambridge, where Jarl and Here remained encamped, receiving food and rent from the subject Englishmen who tilled their allotted lands.¹

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The small number of its settlers, however, was not the only circumstance which distinguished East Anglia from the rest of the Danelaw. Its local institutions remained English, while it was far more closely connected with the English kingdom than its fellow states. We find no trace of Trithing or Wapentake within its bounds. It was from the first too a Christian kingdom. A promise to receive baptism was part of the terms of surrender on Guthrum's side after his defeat at Edington; and "about three weeks after King Guthrum came to *Ælfred* . . . at Alre near Athelney, and the king was his godfather in baptism, and his chrism-loosing² was at Wedmore; and he was twelve days with the king, and he greatly honoured him and his companions with gifts."³ The policy of binding to him as far as he could this portion of the Danelaw was carried on by *Ælfred* in the later frith made between the two kings with "the witan of all the English-folk" "and all the people that are in East Anglia,"

¹ Robertson, "Scotland under Early Kings," vol. ii. Appendix, "The Danelagh."

² Probably the loosing of the fillet bound round the head at confirmation after the anointing of the brow with the chrism.

³ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 878.

which after marking the boundaries of the two realms, fixed the “wer” or life-value of both Englishman and Dane at the same amount,¹ settled the same procedure for claims to property, and pledged either party to refuse to receive deserters from the army or dominions of the other.²

From the Tees to the brink of the Thames valley, from the water-parting of the country to the German Sea, every inch of territory lay in Danish hands. The Danelaw was in fact by far the most important conquest which the northern warriors had made. In extent as in wealth and resources it equalled indeed, or more than equalled the Scandinavian realms themselves. To bring this great possession under their overlordship became, we cannot doubt, the dream of the kings who were beginning to build up the petty realms about them into the monarchies of the North; and it is possible that we find the earliest trace of that ambition which afterwards brought Swein and Harald Hardrada to the shores of Britain in a tale which, oddly as it has been disguised, may in its earlier form be taken as a fair record of the relations between the northern homeland and its outlier in the south. “At this time,” says the Saga

¹ “If a man be slain, we estimate all equally dear, English and Danish.”—Thorpe, “Anc. Laws,” i. 155-6.

² “All ordained when the oaths were sworn that neither bond nor free might go to the host without leave, no more than any of them to us.”—Thorpe, “Anc. Laws,” i. 156-7.

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The
Danelaw
and the
North.

CHAP. III. of Harald Fair-hair,¹ “a king called *Æthelstan* had taken the kingdom of England.” Chronological difficulties hinder us from seeing in this *Æthelstan* the later king of Wessex,² and guide us to Guthrum of East Anglia, who had taken the name of *Æthelstan* at his baptism,³ or to his son and successor who may have borne the same double name. Whichever of these kings it was, “he sent men to Norway to King Harald with this errand, that the messengers should present him with a sword, with hilt and handle gilt, and also its whole sheath adorned with gold and silver and set with precious jewels. The ambassadors presented the sword hilt to the king saying, ‘Here is a sword which King *Æthelstan* sends thee, with the request that thou wilt accept it.’ The king took the sword by the handle; whereupon the ambassadors said, ‘Now thou hast taken the sword according to our king’s desire, and therefore art thou his subject, as thou hast taken his sword.’ King Harald saw now that this was a jest, for he would be subject to no man. But he remembered it was his rule, whenever anything raised his anger, to collect himself and let his passion run off, and then take the matter into consideration coolly. Now he did so and consulted his friends, who all

¹ Laing, “Sea Kings of Norway,” i. 308.

² In the opinion of the editors of the “*Corp. Poet. Boreale*” (G. Vigfusson and F. York Powell) this *Æthelstane* was the King of Wessex.—Vol. i. 262; ii. 489. (A. S. G.)

³ *Æthelweard*, a. 889, lib. iv. c. 3.

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gave him the advice to let the ambassadors in the first place go home in safety

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“The following summer King Harald sent a ship westward to England, and gave the command of it to Hauk Haabrok. He was a great warrior, and very dear to the king. Into his hands he gave his son Hakon. Hauk proceeded westward to England, and found the king in London where there was just at the time a great feast and entertainment. When they came to the hall Hauk told his men how they should conduct themselves; namely, how he who went first in should go last out, and all should stand in a row at the table, at equal distance from each other; and each should have his sword at his left side but should fasten his cloak so that his sword should not be seen. Then they went into the hall, thirty in number. Hauk went up to the king and saluted him, and the king bade him welcome. Then Hauk took the child Hakon, and set it on the king’s knee. The king looks at the boy, and asks Hauk what the meaning of this is. Hauk replies, ‘Harald the king bids thee foster his servant-girl’s child.’ The king was in great anger, and seized a sword which lay beside him, and drew it as if he was going to kill the child. Hauk says, ‘Thou hast borne him on thy knee, and thou canst murder him if thou wilt; but thou wilt not make an end of all King Harald’s sons by so doing.’ On that Hauk went out with all his men, and took the way

CHAP. III. direct to his ship and put to sea—for they were ready—and came back to King Harald. The king was highly pleased with this; for it is the common observation of all people that the man who fosters another's children is of less consideration than the other. From these transactions between the two kings it appears that each wanted to be held greater than the other; but in truth there was no injury to the dignity of either, for each was the upper king in his own kingdom till his dying day."

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**The
Danelaw and
England.**

But whatever may have been the relation of the Danelaw to the Scandinavian homeland, there can be no doubt of the importance of this great settlement viewed in its relation to the country beyond its borders. It was a first step towards the conquest of England. The hard fighting of Wessex, the genius of *Ælfred*, had for the moment checked the conqueror's advance. But what he had won was never lost. Small as were the differences of manners and institutions between Englishman and Dane, the Danelaw preserved an individuality and character which even the reconquest by the West Saxon kings failed to take from it. If it submitted for a while to English rule, it remained a Danish and not an English land; and when the final attack of the Danish kings fell on England, the rising of the Danelaw in *Swein's* aid showed that half his work was done already to his hand. From the landing of *Ivar* to

the landing of Cnut the attack of the Dane on Britain is really a continuous one ; but the heritage of their victory was to pass into the hands of a later conqueror, and the bowing of all England to a Norman king is only the close of a work which began in the parting of Northern and Central England among the Danish holds.

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CHAPTER IV

ÆLFRED

878-901

The weakness of the
Danefaw.
MASTERS as they were of the bulk of Britain, the pressure of the Danes on the England that resisted them must in the end have proved irresistible had their military force remained undiminished and had their political faculty been as great as their genius for war. As we have seen, however, they showed as few traces of political faculty or of any power of national organization as in their own Scandinavia, while the number of their fighting men was lessening every day. Already the conquest of northern Britain had done much to save the south; for the attack of Guthrum on Wessex might have proved as successful as the attack of Ivar on Northumbria, had Ivar's men remained in the ranks of the Danish host instead of settling down as farmers beside the Ouse or the Trent. Peace too, and the Christianity which Guthrum embraced, yet further thinned the Danish ranks;

and at the close of the last campaign against Wessex a large part of the invaders followed Hasting to seek better fortune in Gaul. But even those who remained on English ground clung loosely to their new settlements. It was not Britain but Iceland that drew to it at this time the hearts of the northern rovers; and the English Danelaw often served as a mere stepping-stone between Norway and its offshoot in the northern seas. Of the names of the original settlers of Iceland which are recorded in the *Landnama*, its Domesday book, more than a half are those of men who had found an earlier settlement in the British Isles.¹

At the moment we have reached, however, even *Ælfred's work of restoration.* *Ælfred's* eye could hardly have discerned the weakness of the Danelaw. It was with little of a conqueror's exultation that the young king turned from his victories in the west. He looked on the peace he had won as a mere break in the struggle, and as a break that might at any moment come suddenly to an end. Even in the years of tranquillity which followed it there never was an hour when he felt safe against an inroad of the Danes over Watling Street, or a landing of pirates in the

¹ Dasent, translation of Njal's "Saga," Intr. p. xii. The most trustworthy accounts, such as that of the *Landnamabok*, of the first settlements in Iceland show how mixed the population of the British Islands then was. Besides the overwhelming numbers of the northmen, there are found men and women of Danish, Swedish, and Flemish descent who joined in the emigration from Britain to Iceland. (A. S. G.)

CHAP. IV.

Ælfred.878-901.

CHAP. IV. **Severn.** “Oh, what a happy man was he,” he cries once, “that man that had a naked sword hanging over his head from a single thread—so as to me it always did!”¹ And yet peace was absolutely needful for the work that lay before him. If the deliverance of Wessex had shown the exhaustion of the Danes, Wessex itself was as utterly spent by fifty years of continuous effort, and above all by the last five years of deadly struggle. Law, order, the machinery of justice and government, had been weakened by the pirate storm. Schools and monasteries had for the most part perished. Many of the towns and villages lay wrecked or in ruin. There were whole tracts of country that lay wasted and without inhabitants after the Danish raids. Material and moral civilization indeed had alike to be revived. All however might be set right, as the king touchingly said, “if we have stillness;”² and in these first years of peace the work of restoration went rapidly on. Ælfred had to wrestle indeed with the penury of the royal Hoard; for so utterly had it been drained by the payments to the pirates and the cost of the recent struggle that the sons of Æthelwulf had been driven to the miserable expedient of debasing the currency, and it was not till Ælfred’s later days that the coinage could be raised to a sounder standard.³ He had to

¹ Ælfred’s Boethius, in Sharon Turner’s “Hist. Anglo-Sax.” vol. ii. p. 45.

² Pref. to *Pastoral Book* (ed. Sweet).

³ Robertson, “Hist. Essays,” p. 64.

wrestle too yet harder with the sluggishness of his subjects. There were scarcely any who would undertake the slightest voluntary labour for the common benefit of the realm ; persuasion had after long endurance to pass into command ; and even commands were slowly and imperfectly carried out.¹ Great however as were the obstacles, the work was done. Forts were built in places specially exposed to attack,² and wasted lands were colonized afresh. Bishop Denewulf of Winchester tells us how his land at Bedhampton “when my lord first let it to me was unprovided with cattle and laid waste by heathen folk ; and I myself then provided the cattle, and there people were afterwards.”³ So too new abbeys were founded at Winchester and Shaftesbury ; while the king’s gratitude for his deliverance raised a religious house among the marshes of Athelney.

Busy however as *Ælfred* was with the restoration of order and good government, his main efforts were directed to the military organization of his people.⁴ He had learned during the years of hard fighting with which his life began, how unsuited the military system of the country had become to the needs of war as the Danes practised it. The one national army was the fyrd, a force which had

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His military
reforms.

¹ Asser (ed. Wise), p. 59.

² *Ibid.* p. 58.

³ Thorpe, “Diplomatarium,” p. 162.

⁴ Stubbs (“Const. Hist.” i. 220 et seq.) has examined this subject ; but we have little real information about it from contemporary documents.

CHAP. IV. already received in the Karolingian legislation the name of “landwehr” by which the German knows it still. The fyrd was in fact composed of the whole mass of free landowners who formed the folk : and to the last it could only be summoned by the voice of the folk-moot. In theory therefore such a host represented the whole available force of the country. But in actual warfare its attendance at the king’s war-call was limited by practical difficulties. Arms were costly ; and the greater part of the fyrd came equipped with bludgeons and hedge-stakes, which could do little to meet the spear and battle-axe of the invader. The very growth of the kingdom too had broken down the old military system. A levy of every freeman was possible when one folk warred with another folk, when a single march took the warrior to the border, and a single fight settled the matter between the tiny peoples. But now that folk after folk had been absorbed in great kingdoms, now that the short march had lengthened into distant expeditions, the short fight into long campaigns, it was hard to reconcile the needs of labour and of daily bread with the needs of war. Ready as he might be to follow the king to a fight which ended the matter, the farmer who tilled his own farm could serve only as long as his home-needs would suffer him. Custom had fixed his service at a period of two months. But as the industrial condition of the country advanced such a service became more and

more difficult to enforce ; even in Ine's day it was needful to fix heavy fines by law for men who "neglected the fyrd,"¹ and it broke down before the new conditions of warfare brought about by the strife with the Danes. However thoroughly they were beaten, the Danes had only to fall back behind their entrenchments, and wait in patience till the two months of the host's service were over, and the force which besieged them melted away. It was this which had again and again neutralized the successes of the West-Saxon kings. It was the thinning of their own ranks in the hour of victory which forced Æthelred to conventions such as that of Nottingham, and Ælfred to conventions such as that of Exeter. The Dane in fact had changed the whole conditions of existing warfare. His forces were really standing armies, and a standing army of some sort was needed to meet them.

It was to provide such a force that the kings, from Ælfred to Æthelstan, gave a new extension to the class of thegns.² The growth of this class had formed, as we have seen, a marked part of the social revolution which had preceded the Danish wars. But a fresh importance had been given to the thegn by the shock which the structure of society had received from the long struggle. The free ceorl had above all felt the stress of war ; in

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thegn-class.¹ Ine's Law ; Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 134-5.² Stubbs, "Const. Hist." i. 220 et seq.

CHAP. IV. his need of a protector he was beginning to waive
Ælfred. freedom for safety, and to "commend" himself to
878-901. a thegn who would fight for him on condition that
 he followed his new "lord" as his "man" to the
 field. On the other hand, the lands wasted by
 the Danes were repeopled for the most part by
 the rural nobles, who provided the settlers with
 cattle and implements of culture, and in turn
 received service from them.¹ So rapid was this
 process that the class of free ceorls seems to have
 become all but extinguished, while that of thegns
 in its various degrees—king's thegn, the "baron"
 of the later feudalism; middle thegn, a pre-
 decessor of the country knight; and lesser thegn,
 or all who possessed "soke," or private juris-
 diction within their lands²—came to include the
 bulk of the landowners. The warlike temper of
 the thegnhood, its military traditions, its de-
 pendence on the king at whose summons it
 was bound to appear in the host, above all, its
 wealth, enabled it to bring to the field a force
 well equipped and provided with resources for a
 campaign; and it was with a sound instinct that
 Ælfred and his house seized on it as the nucleus
 of a new military system.

The new army.

Its special recognition as a leading element in
 our social organization belongs most probably to

¹ Cod. Dip. 1089. See Robertson's remarks, "Hist. Essays," Intr. p. liv. note.

² Cnut's Laws, sec. 72. Thorpe, "Anc. Laws," i. 415.

his days or to those of his son ; and a law which we may look upon as part at least of the king's reforms gave the class of thegns at once a wide military extension by subjecting all owners of five hides of land to thegn service.¹ By a development of the same principle, which we find established in later times, but whose origin we may fairly look for here, the whole country was divided into military districts, each five hides sending an armed man at the king's summons, and providing him with victuals and pay. Each borough, too, was rated as one or more such districts, and sent its due contingent, from one soldier to twelve. While this organization furnished the solid nucleus of a well-armed and permanent force, the duty of every freeman to join the host remained binding as before. But a simple reform met some at least of the difficulties which had as yet neutralized its effectiveness. On the resumption of the war we find that Ælfred had reorganized this national force by dividing the fyrd into two halves, each of which took by turns its service in the field, while the other half was exempted from field-service on condition of defending its own burhs and manning the rough entrenchments round every township.²

¹ Thorpe, "Anc. Laws and Inst.," i. 191. "If a ceorl thrived so that he had fully five hides of his own land, church and kitchen, bell-house and 'burh'-gate-seat, and special duty in the king's hall, then was he thenceforth of thane-right worthy." Compare the "North Peoples' Law," secs. 5 and 9, *ibid.* pp. 187, 189.

² Eng. Chron. a. 894.

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CHAP. IV. A garrison and reserve force was thus added to the army on service ; and the attendance of its warriors in the field could be more rigorously enforced.

Ælfred. Further than this it was impossible to go. But the results of the new system were seen when the war broke out again in later years. The balance of warlike effectiveness passed from the invaders to the West Saxons. The fyrd became an army. In the skilful choice of positions, in the use of entrenchments, in rapidity of marching as well as in the shock of the battlefield, the Danes found themselves face to face with men who had patiently learned to be their match. The reorganization of the fyrd however was only a part of the task of military reform which Ælfred set himself. Alone among the rulers of his time he saw that the battle with the pirates must really be fought out upon the sea. Clear them from the land as he might, safety was impossible while every inch of blue water which washed the English coast was the northman's realm. But to win the sea was a harder task than to win back the land. Ælfred had only to organize the national army ; he had to create a national fleet. It was not indeed that Englishmen had ever lost their love for the sea ; fishers and coasters abounded from the first along the Northumbrian shore, and ports such as Yarmouth and London can hardly have depended for traffic on foreign shipping. That no mention is made in

**Creation of
a navy.**

earlier times of a “ship-fyrd,” or assessment for the equipment of a fleet, is due to the fact that the struggles of early England had as yet been land struggles within the bounds of the country itself ; but on the first outbreak of a foreign war, the war of Ecgfrith with Ireland, the Irish coast was ravaged by a fleet which must have been raised through a public contribution and manned by sailors accustomed to stormy seas.¹ In the south indeed no English navy seems to have existed during the earlier period of the northern attacks. The seizure of Wareham, however, spurred Ælfred to create a fleet.² He built larger ships than had as yet been used for warfare ; and though forced by the greater skill of the northmen in sea matters to man his vessels with “pirates” from Friesland, their action did much to decide the fate of Exeter. This naval force was steadily developed.³ In Ælfred’s later years his fleet was strong enough to encounter the pirate-ships of the East Anglians ; and in the reign of his son an English force of a hundred vessels asserted its mastery of the Channel.⁴

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Ælfred.878-901.

¹ A.D. 684. Bæda, H. E. lib. iv. c. 26. (A. S. G.)

² Asser, a. 877 (ed. Wise, p. 29) :—“Jussit cymbas et galeas, id est, longas naves fabricari per regnum.”

³ See Eng. Chron. a. 897.

⁴ We can hardly attribute to Ælfred the law that we find in force in Eadgar’s day, by which a ship was due from every three hundreds, probably of the coast-shires ; but some such law there must have been to account for Eadward’s fleet.

CHAP. IV. shire-moot alike on noble and ceorl, "who were
Ælfred. constantly at obstinate variance with one another
878-901. in the folk-moots before ealdorman and reeve, so
 that hardly any one of them would grant that to
 be true doom that had been judged for doom by
 the ealdorman and reeves."¹ But even the doom
 of the folk-moot was subject on appeal to the
 justice of the king.² Judicial business, in fact,
 occupied a large part of Ælfred's time. He was
 busied, says his biographer, "day and night" in
 the correction of local injustice, "for in that whole
 kingdom the poor had no helpers, or few, save the
 king himself."³ The work was one which brought
 with it bitter resistance, and the strife even with
 men of his own house for law and justice left pain
 and disappointment in Ælfred's heart. "Desirest
 thou power?" he asks in one of his writings. "But
 thou shalt never obtain it without sorrow, sorrow
 from strange folk, and yet keener sorrows from
 thine own kindred."⁴ "Hardship and sorrow!"
 he breaks out again; "not a king but would wish

¹ Asser (ed. Wise), p. 69. "Nobilium et ignobilium . . . qui sæpissime in concionibus comitum et præpositorum pertinacissime inter se dissentiebant, ita ut pene nullus eorum quicquid a comitibus et præpositis judicatum fuisset, verum esse concederet." As Stubbs ("Const. Hist." i. 112, note) points out, this shows "that ealdorman and gerefa, eorl and ceorl, had their places in these courts," and that, "although the officers might declare the law, the ultimate determination rested in each case with the suitors."

² Asser (ed. Wise), p. 70.

³ *Ibid.* p. 69.

⁴ Ælfred's *Boethius*, in Sharon Turner's "Hist. Anglo-Sax." vol. ii. p. 43.

to be without these if he could. But I know that he cannot.”¹

Gloom or anxiety however failed even for a moment to check his activity in the work of restoration.² He was as busy without Wessex as within. In the division of Britain at the peace of Wedmore he had saved from the grasp of the Danes the western portion of the Mercian kingdom, the upper valleys of the Thames and the Trent, the whole valley of the Severn with the outlier of the Hwiccan territory in Arden, and the more northerly region of our Shropshire and Cheshire. Of what vital importance this tract was to prove we shall see in the after part of our story. It was from it that *Ælfred* drew the teachers who began the intellectual and religious restoration of the rescued realm. It was from it that his daughter

¹ *Ælfred's Boethius*, in Sharon Turner's “Hist. Anglo-Sax.” vol. ii. p. 45.

² Later tradition (Will. Malm. “Gest. Reg.” (Hardy), i. p. 186) attributed to *Ælfred* the institution of the shire, the hundred, and the tithing; and Professor Stubbs (“Const. Hist.” i. 112) suggests a real ground for this. “The West-Saxon shires appear in history under their permanent names, and with a shire organization much earlier than those of Mercia and Northumberland; while Kent, Essex, and East Anglia had throughout an organization derived from their old status as kingdoms. It is in Wessex, further, that the hundredal division is supplemented by that of the tithing. It may then be argued that the whole hundredal system radiates from the West-Saxon kingdom, and that the variations mark the gradual extension of that power as it won its way to supremacy under Egbert or Ethelwulf, or recovered territory from the Danes under *Ælfred* and Edward, Athelstan, Edmund, Edred, and Edgar. If this be allowed, the claim of *Ælfred*, as founder, not of the hundred-law, but of the hundredal divisions, may rest on something firmer than legend.”

CHAP. IV.

Ælfred.

878-901.

English
Mercia.

CHAP. VI. in later days advanced to the conquest of Mid-Britain. It was of more immediate value as Alfred. parting the Welshmen from the Danes, and thus paving the way for that complete reduction of the former which was the necessary prelude to any effective struggle with the settlers of the Danelaw. 878-901. But what immediately fronted the young king was the question of its government. The question was one of great moment, not only in its bearing on Mercia, but in its bearing on the future of England itself. The royal stocks, once the centres and representatives of the separate folks, were dying out one by one. In the earlier days of Ecgberht the only kings that retained political life were those of Northumbria, Mercia, and Wessex, with the tributary realms of East Anglia and of Kent. Of these the Kentish kings soon came to an end, while the strife over the succession in Northumbria sprang from the virtual extinction of its royal stock. But the action of Ecgberht even in the moment of his triumph showed that so long as the royal races existed at all any real union of the English peoples in one political body was practically impossible.

The Mercian
ealdor-
manry.

The difficulty indeed could hardly have been solved save by some violent shock ; and the shock was given by the coming of the Danes. Before fifty years were over the royal houses of Northumbria, of East Anglia, of Mercia, were brought to an end. The two claimants to the northern

throne perished in the battle of York. The martyrdom of Eadmund closed the East-Anglian line; while that of Mercia ended in the flight of Burhred to Rome before the inroad of Guthrum. It was thus that the position of Ælfred differed radically from that of Ecgberht; for even had he wished to restore the mere supremacy over Mercia which Ecgberht had wielded, he had no royal house through which to restore it. He was driven in fact by the very force of things to be not merely a West-Saxon over-lord of Mercia, but a Mercian king. He made no attempt to fuse Mercia into Wessex; it remained a separate though dependent state with its Mercian witenagemot and Mercian ruler, Æthelred, who may have sprung from the stock of its older kings. But Æthelred was simply Ealdorman of the Mercians. Though Ælfred uses in his dealings with Mercia only the general title of "King," it was as King of the Mercians that he acted; their Ealdorman owned him as his lord, and their Witan met by his licence. How thoroughly Ælfred asserted royal rights in Mid-Britain may be seen indeed from his Mercian coinage. Coinage in the old world was the unquestioned test of kingship, and a mint which Ælfred set up at Oxford¹

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Ælfred.
878-901.

¹ "We have in the British Museum," Mr. Barclay V. Head has been good enough to write to me, "a whole series of Ælfred's coins, struck at various mints, and among them are some discovered some twenty or thirty years ago at Cuerdale, which read 'ORSNAFORDA.' It is usual to attribute these

CHAP. IV. within the borders of the Mercian Ealdormanry
Ælfred. proves even more than the submissive words of
878-901. Witan or Ealdorman the reality of his rule. In fact Wessex and Mercia were now united, as Wessex and Kent had long been united, by their allegiance to the same ruler; and the foundation of a national monarchy was laid in the personal loyalty of Jute and Engle and Saxon alike to the house of Cerdic.¹

to Oxford." On a subsequent personal examination however he finds that the word has been misread, and is clearly "OKSNAFORDA," which must be taken as the earliest authentic form of the town's name. No written evidence for Oxford's existence can be found before its mention in the Chronicle in 912 in the following reign.

¹ We find *Æthelred* an Ealdorman under Burhred, c. 872-4 (Kemb. Cod. Dipl. 304). His first extant charter under *Ælfred* is of 880, as "dux et patricius gentis Merciorum," and already married to *Æthelflæd*, who signs it. In 884 he signs as "Merciorum gentis ducatum gubernans" (Cod. Dip. 1066); in 888 as "procurator in dominio regni Merciorum" (*ib.* 1068). The grant of 880 is "cum licentia et impositione manus *Ælfredi regis*, una cum testimonio et consensu seniorum ejusdem gentis (Merciorum)." "*Ælfred rex*" signs first, then "*Æthered dux*," then "*Æthelflæd conjunx*" (Cod. Dip. 311). Another grant in 883 is with *Ælfred*'s "leave and witness" (*ib.* 313). And so, in 896, when *Æthelred* summons the Mercian Witan, "that did he with king *Ælfred*'s witness and leave" (*ib.* 1073). In a charter however of 901 (Cod. Dip. 330), *Ælfred*'s last year of reign, there is no mention of *Ælfred*, but of "*Æthered* *Æl*(elflædque) dei gratiâ monarchiam Merciorum tenentes honorificeque gubernantes et defendantes;" the grant is made solely "cum licentia et testimonio pantorum procerum Merciorum;" and signed "Ego *Æthered*, Ego *Æthelflæd*," without titles. This does not however represent a new position taken by *Æthelred* at *Ælfred*'s death and *Eadward*'s accession, though it is notable that *Æthelweard*, a. 894 (lib. iv. c. 3), calls him "rex," for in 903 we find a Mercian ealdorman asking a grant from "Eadwardum regem, *Æthelredum quoque et Æthelfledam*, qui tunc principatum et potestatem gentis Merciæ sub prædicto rege tenuerunt" (Cod. Dip. 1081).

Important as was the union of Wessex and Mercia in itself as a step towards national unity, it led to a step yet more important in the fusion of the customary codes of the English peoples into a common law. The sphere of the written codes might be narrow in relation to the whole body of customary law, but they had by Ælfred's day come to be regarded as its representatives, and thus to be specially representative of the tribal life which the customary law embodied. As king therefore of Wessex, of Kent, and of Mercia, Ælfred found himself an administrator of three separate codes, whose differences, however slight, reflected the distinctions which held each of these states apart from the other. Of a new legislation, or of the bringing a larger sphere of English life within the scope of the written law, the king had no thought. The very notion of new legislation indeed, ungrounded on custom, was without hold on him or his people. "I durst not," he says frankly, "venture to set down in writing much of my own, for it was unknown to me what of it would please those who should come after us." All that he could venture on was a certain amount of rejection; "many of those dooms which seemed to me not good, I rejected them by the counsel of my witan;" but the main work was simply a work of compilation.¹ "Those things which I met

CHAP. IV.

Ælfred.878-901.Ælfred's laws.

¹ Of the seventy-seven clauses of Ælfred's law, fifty-three relate to personal injuries; these are taken from the Kentish

CHAP. IV. with, either of the days of Ine, my kinsman, or of Ælfred. Offa, king of the Mercians, or of Æthelberht, who first among the English race received baptism, those which seemed to me the rightest, those I have gathered together and rejected the others.”¹ But unpretending as the work might seem, its importance was great. With it began the conception of a national law. The notion of separate systems of tribal customs passed away with the weakening of the notion of tribal life; and the codes of Wessex, Mercia, and Kent blended in the doom-book of a common England.

The
Danes in
Frankland. The king’s work of peace, however, was now drawing to an end. We have seen how anxiously, while girding himself for the coming strife, Ælfred was looking out through these six years of quiet, from 878 to 884, over the West-Saxon frontier.² What helped him to give rest to his land—as he knew well—was not only the peace of Wedmore, but the work which the pirates had found to do on the other side of the Channel; for their defeat in England had thrown them back on

codes, especially that of Æthelberht, with but slight change save in the amount of the fine. The rest are mainly borrowed from Ine, whose agricultural laws however are wholly omitted; and there are a few miscellaneous laws, which may be Ælfred’s own, or taken from the lost code of Offa.

¹ Thorpe, “Anc. Laws and Instit.” i. 59.

² Among other causes for anxiety was the desertion of Englishmen to the Danes. In Cod. Dip. 1078, we hear of an ealdorman, Wulfhere, who “suum dominum regem Ælfredum et patriam, ultra jusjurandum quam regi et suis omnibus optimatibus juraverat, dereliquit.” This is a very early instance of the oath of allegiance.

their old field of attack in the land of the Franks. The establishment of the Danelaw gave them a base of operations for descents on the opposite coast,¹ and when the host under Guthrum sailed home to East Anglia after its repulse from Wessex, it was in order to sail off again to the Scheldt. The close of the struggle in England threw in fact the whole weight of the pirate onset on the Franks. It fell above all on northern Frankland, and soon the Scheldt, the Meuse, and the Rhine were full of pirate squadrons. The Frank kings fought bravely as of old, though their strength was still broken by the dynastic quarrels which the dream of restoring the empire of Charles the Great stirred up perpetually among his descendants. But the resistance of Wessex roused a new vigour among its neighbours. Lewis the German fought the pirates hard on the Scheldt, while two grandsons of Charles the Bald, Lewis and Caroman, who mounted the throne of the West Franks in the year after the peace of Wedmore, checked Guthrum by a victory at Saucourt on the Somme. The contest however drew larger hosts to Guthrum's aid, and an overpowering force poured up the Rhine and harried Lorraine as far as Aachen. Lewis the German and Lewis of the West Franks alike passed away in this hour of gloom, while Caroman, still battling with the pirate host as it poured from Aachen over western Frankland, died in 884.

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Alfred.
878-901.

¹ Eng. Chron. 880-4.

CHEAP. IV. But the hard fighting told. The old ease with which the northmen passed from land to land as resistance drove them to seek fresh ground for their forays was coming fast to an end. On both sides of the sea their hosts found men ready to meet blow with blow. When the pirates who had quitted the Loire steered for Wessex, Ælfred's new fleet was ready for them ; and a brisk engagement, in which four of their ships were sunk or captured, drove them from the coast.¹ The bulk of their hosts, who had followed Hasting to northern Frankland, had to fight a stubborn fight at Haslo against the Emperor Charles. Before blows such as these the Vikings were driven to draw their whole force together, and in 884 the fleet of the northmen was concentrated in the Somme. To rest idle however was to starve, and part of their host soon moved to Lorraine, while part pushed up the Thames and beset Rochester.² But the old days of panic were over, and Rochester held bravely out till Ælfred could hurry to its relief and drive its besiegers to the sea with the loss of their horses.³ Short as the campaign had been, it was to have important results. Though the repulse of the pirates had been quick enough to hinder a general rising of the Danelaw in their aid, the Danes of Guthrum's kingdom had already

¹ Eng. Chron. a. 882.

² *Ibid.* 885.

³ "Equis, quos de Francia secum adduxerant."—Asser (ed. Wise), p. 37. This shows the size of their ships.

Their attack
on England.

Ælfred.

878-901.

set aside the Frith of Wedmore and given help to their brethren.¹ No sooner, therefore, had the pirate-force retreated from Rochester than West-Saxon ships from Kent appeared off the East-Anglian coast to punish this breach of faith. A squadron of the freebooters was captured at the mouth of the Stour, and its crews slain. The insult was avenged by a sudden and successful rally of the East Anglians in which the king's ships were destroyed, but the measures which *Ælfred* took in the next year show that the rally was followed by submission, and that a fresh peace had been made between the combatants on terms that implied Guthrum's recognition of the superior strength of the West-Saxon king.

The Essex which the Danes had occupied till now as a dependency of their East-Anglian realm must have been the older kingdom of the East Saxons, a tract which included not only the modern shire that bears their name, but our Middlesex and Hertfordshire, and whose centre, or "mother-city," was London. London had as yet played little part in English history; indeed for nearly half a century after its conquest by the East Saxons it wholly disappears from our view. Its position, however, was such that traffic could not long fail to re-create the town, and the advantages which had drawn trade and population to the Roman Londinium must have already been at work in repeopling the

CHAP. IV.
Ælfred.
878-901.

*Ælfred and
London.*

¹ *Æthelweard*, a. 885, lib. iv. c. 3.

CHAP. IV. English London. Its growth however was for a while to be arrested ; for the conquest of the town by Ecgberht in his general reunion of the English states was quickly followed by the struggle with the Danes. To London the war brought all but ruin ; so violent in fact was the shock to its life that its very bishoprick seemed for a time to cease to exist.¹ The Roman walls must have been broken and ruined, for we hear of no resistance such as that which in later days made the city England's main bulwark against northern attack ; and in 851 it was plundered by the marauders, who again wintered at Fulham in 880, when the city was probably subjected anew to their devastations. At the peace of Wedmore it must have been left like the rest of Essex in the hands of Guthrum. But with the war of 886 came its deliverance, for at the close of the strife with East Anglia we find London in Ælfred's hands. Whether he had won it by actual siege or no,² he "peopled" or "settled" it, and handed it over to the Mercian caldorman Æthelred to hold against the Danes.

The division of Essex. The cession of London, however, was only part of the sacrifice by which Guthrum won peace.

¹ Stubb's, "Const. Hist." i. 275.

² "Obsidetur a rege Ælfredo urbs Lundonii," says Æthelweard ; but Earle ("Parallel Chron." p. 310) argues that this is a mere misconception of the Chron. a. 886, "gesette Ælfred cyning Lundenburg," Æthelweard substituting "besette" for "gesette," "besieged" for "colonized" or "peopled." All the later authorities follow the Chronicle, or Asser's "restauravit et habitabilem fecit."—Asser (ed. Wise), p. 52.

BRITAIN
after the
TREATY OF 886.

English Miles
0 20 40 60 80



Walker & Boutall del. et sc.

The geographical boundaries which it names show that the “Frith between *Ælfred* and *Guthrum*,” which has commonly been identified with the Frith concluded at Wedmore, is really the peace of 886; and that its provisions represent a territorial readjustment by which East Anglia bought peace from the king. The older Essex was broken into two parts by an artificial line of demarcation between *Guthrum*’s realm and the Mercian ealdormany, a line which passed from the Thames up the Lea as far as its sources near Hertford, thence struck straight over the Chilterns, and down their slopes into the valley of the Ouse at Bedford, and thence followed the countless bends of Ouse to the point where its course was cut by the line of the Watling Street near Stony Stratford.¹ In other words, the western half of the East-Saxon kingdom was torn away from the eastern half to form a district around London.² The division may be but the return to

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Ælfred.
878-901.

¹ Thorpe, “Anc. Laws,” i. 153. At this point where the line hit the Watling Street the territories of *Guthrum* and Mercia ceased to march together, and it was therefore needless further to define the boundaries of either. But the border-line refers strictly to these two realms; and the common reading of it, as if from this point Watling Street formed the bound between the rest of the Danelaw, *i.e.* the territory of the Five Boroughs and Mercia, has no foundation in the actual text of the frith. There must have been a separate frith between the Five Boroughs and English Mercia, no doubt with a like definition of the boundary line, as there was certainly such a frith between Wessex and Northumbria (Eng. Chron. a. 911), but both are lost.

² Asser (ed. Wise), p. 5, says of London, “Quae est sita in aquilonari ripa Tamesis fluminis, in confinio East-Seaxum, et Middle-Seaxum, sed tamen ad East-Seaxum illa civitas cum

CHAP. IV. an earlier arrangement; for some such parting must have taken place when Ecgberht joined Essex to his “eastern kingdom” of Kent, while London was still left in Mercian hands. This arrangement however was so soon put an end to by the reunion of London and Essex in the kingdom of Guthrum, that it would have left hardly a trace of its existence but for the permanent severance which was now made by the Frith of 886. It was this which gave both territories the shape which they still retain, which fixed the border of Essex at the Lea, and annexed to London that district, which from its position between West Saxon and East Saxon, either now or at some earlier time, was known as the land of the Middlesex.

Position of
the Danes
reversed.

In a military point of view the recovery of the Thames valley, with the winning and fortification of London, was of great moment, for it closed to the Danes that water-way by which in past times the pirates had advanced to the attack of Wessex. Its military results however proved to be the least results of the war. Till now Ælfred's victories had seemed a mere saving of Wessex, a temporary repulse of the Dane from a part of Britain.

veritate pertinet.” It may be doubted whether “Middle-Sexe” were heard of before this assignment of the old East-Saxon borderland as a “*Pagus*” for London in 886, when the need arose for a distinguishing name for its inhabitants. I shall however deal afterwards with the bearing of this division on the general question of the “shires”; here we need only note that the question has hardly arisen, as the line of the Frith is far from representing the later lines of the shires along its course.

But the character of the war, as it reopened in 885, showed how much greater a work than this had been done at Athelney and Edington. With the Frith of Wedmore the whole military position of the Danes had in fact been reversed. From an attitude of attack they had been thrown back on an attitude of defence. The northmen had failed to crush the house of Cerdic, and already it seemed as if the house of Cerdic was turning to crush the northmen. The driving off of the pirates, the attack on East Anglia, the recovery of London and the lands about it, showed England that in Wessex and its king the country possessed a force not only strong enough to withstand the Danes, but strong enough to take in hand the undoing of what the Danes had done.

The consciousness of such a change at once made itself felt. If any date can be given for the foundation of a national monarchy, as distinct from the earlier supremacy of king over king, it is the year 886. In that year, says the Chronicle, "all the Angel-cyn turned to *Ælfred*, save those that were under bondage to Danish men."¹ The old tribal jealousies were, if not destroyed, at least subordinated to the sense of a common patriotism, and a sense of national existence began from this moment to give life and vigour to the new conception of a national sovereignty. If the Dane had struck down the dominion of Ecgberht, it was the

CHAP. IV.
Ælfred.
878-901.

Rise of
national
sentiment.

¹ Eng. Chron. (Winch.), a. 886.

CHAP. IV. Dane who was to bring about even more than its restoration. Set face to face with a foreign foe, the English people was waking to a consciousness of its own existence ; the rule of the stranger was crushing provincial jealousies and deepening the sense of a common nationality; while the question of political and military supremacy was settled as it had never been settled before. Wessex alone had repulsed the Dane. The West Saxons had not only kept their own freedom ; they had become the only possible champions of the freedom of other Englishmen. The old jealousy of their greatness was lost in a craving for their aid, for it was plain that deliverance from the invader, if it came at all, must come through the sword of the West-Saxon king. It was no wonder then that the eyes of Northumbrian and Mercian turned more and more to *Ælfred*, or that his work gleamed over England like a light of hope. His slow patient undoing of the evil which the Danes had done in Wessex was a promise of its undoing throughout the nation at large.

*Intellectual
ruin of
England.* But if the growth of this sentiment gave a moral strength to *Ælfred's* position, the sentiment itself gained largeness and dignity from the conception of national rule which it found embodied in the king. Hardly had this second breathing-space been won in the long conflict with the enemy than *Ælfred* turned anew to his work of restoration. The ruin that the Danes had wrought

had been no mere material ruin. When they first CHAP. IV.
appeared off her shores, England stood in the Ælfred.
forefront of European culture; her scholars, her
libraries, her poetry, had no rivals in the western
world. But all, or nearly all, of this culture had
disappeared. The art and learning of North-
umbria had been destroyed at a blow; and
throughout the rest of the Danelaw the ruin was
as complete. The very Christianity of Mid-Britain
was shaken; the sees of Dunwich and Lindsey
came to an end; at Lichfield and Elmham the
succession of bishops became broken and irregular;
even London hardly kept its bishop's stool. But
its letters and civilization were more than shaken;
they had vanished in the sack of the great abbeys
of the Fen. Even in Wessex, which ranked as the
least advanced of the English kingdoms, Ælfred
could recall that he saw as a child "how the
churches stood filled with treasures and books,
and there was also a great multitude of God's
servants;" but this was "before it had all been
ravaged and burned."¹ "So clean was learning
decayed among English folk," says the king, "that
very few were there on this side Humber that
could understand their rituals in English, or
translate aught out of Latin into English, and I

¹ "I remembered also how I saw, before it had all been
ravaged and burned, how the churches throughout the whole of
England stood filled with treasures and books, and there was
also a great multitude of God's servants."—Pref. to Ælfred's
translation of Gregory's Pastoral (ed. Sweet).

CHAP. IV. ween there were not many beyond the Humber.
Ælfred. So few of them were there, that I cannot bethink
878-901. me of a single one south of Thames when I came
to the kingdom.”¹ It was in fact only in the
fragment of Mercia which had been saved from the
invaders that a gleam of the old intellectual light
lingered in the school which Bishop Werfrith had
gathered round him at Worcester.

**Ælfred's
intellectual
work.** It is in his efforts to repair this intellectual ruin
that we see Ælfred's conception of the work he had
to do. The Danes had no doubt brought with
them much that was to enrich the temper of the
coming England, a larger and freer manhood, a
greater daring, a more passionate love of personal
freedom, better seamanship and a warmer love of
the sea, a keener spirit of traffic, and a range of
trade-ventures which dragged English commerce
into a wider world. But their work of destruction
threatened to rob England of things even more
precious than these. In saving Wessex Ælfred
had saved the last refuge of all that we sum up in
the word civilization, of that sense of a common
citizenship and nationality, of the worth of justice
and order and good government, of the harmony
of individual freedom in its highest form with the
general security of society, of the need for a
co-operation of every moral and intellectual force
in the development both of the individual man
and of the people as a whole, which England had

¹ Pref. to *Pastoral* (ed. Sweet).

for two centuries been either winning from its own experience or learning from the tradition of the past. It was because literature embodied what was worthiest in this civilization that *Ælfred* turned to the restoration of letters. He sought in Mercia for the learning that Wessex had lost.¹ He made the Mercian Plegmund Archbishop of Canterbury;² Werfrith, Bishop of Worcester, helped him in his own literary efforts, and two Mercian priests, *Æthelstan* and *Werwulf*, became his chaplains and tutors. But it was by example as well as precept that the king called England again to the studies it had abandoned. "What of all his troubles troubled him the most," he used to say, "was that when he had the age and ability to learn he could find no masters." But now that masters could be had he worked day and night.³ He stirred nowhere without having some scholar by him. He remained true indeed to his own tongue and his own literature. His memory was full of English songs, as he had caught them from singers' lips; and he was not only fond of repeating them but taught them carefully to his children.⁴

¹ Asser (ed. Wise), p. 46.

² Eng. Chron. (Peterborough), a. 890.

³ "Die noctuque, quandocunque aliquam licentiam haberet, libros ante se recitare talibus imperabat, non enim unquam sine aliquo eorum se esse pateretur, quapropter pene omnium librorum notitiam habebat, quamvis per seipsum aliquid adhuc de libris intelligere non posset; non enim adhuc aliquid legere incepérat."—Asser (ed Wise), p. 46.

⁴ "Et Saxonicos libros recitare, et maxime Saxonica carmina memoriter discere, aliis imperare, et solus assidue pro viribus

CHAP. IV.

Ælfred.

878-901.

CHAP. IV. But he knew that the actual knowledge of the world must be sought elsewhere. Before many years were over he had taught himself Latin,¹ and was soon skilled enough in it to render Latin books into the English tongue.

Asser. His wide sympathy sought for aid in this work from other lands than his own. "In old time," the king wrote sadly,² "men came hither from foreign lands to seek for instruction; and now, if we are to have it, we can only get it from abroad." He sought it among the West Franks and the East Franks; Grimbald came from St. Omer to preside over the new abbey he founded at Winchester, while John the Old Saxon was fetched, it may be from the Westphalian abbey of Corbey, to rule the

studiosissime non desinebat."—Asser (ed. Wise), p. 43. His children, Eadward and Ælfthryth, were not left "sine liberali disciplina," "nam et psalmos et Saxonicos libros et maxime Saxonica carmina studiose didicere, et frequentissime libris utuntur."—*Ib.* p. 43. In the palace-school "utriusque linguae libri, Latinae scilicet et Saxonice assidue legebantur."—*Ib.* p. 43. So of his nobles, if any were too ignorant or old to profit by "liberalibus studiis," "Suum si haberet filium, aut etiam aliquem propinquum suum, vel etiam si aliter non habeat suum proprium hominem liberum vel servum, quem ad lectionem longe ante promoverat, libros ante se die nocteque quondocunque unquam ullani haberet licentiam Saxoncos imperabat recitare."—Asser (ed. Wise), p. 71. Stray references throughout his writings show his familiarity with the Old English hero-legends: "Where are now the bones of Weland?" he renders the "Fabricii ossa" of Boethius.

¹ Either in 885 or 887. See Pauli, "Life of Ælfred," p. 169. "Non enim adhuc legere incepérat," says Asser (ed. Wise), p. 46, apparently of the time soon after the Frith of Wedmore. I take "legere" to have its usual meaning, that of reading and translating Latin.

² Pref. to Pastoral Book.

monastery he set up at Athelney.¹ A Welsh bishop was drawn with the same end to Wessex; and the account he has left of his visit and doings at the court brings us face to face with the king. "In those days," says Bishop Asser, "I was called by the king from the western and furthest border of Britain and came to Saxon-land; and when in a long journey I set about approaching him I arrived in company with guides of that people as far as the region of the Saxons who lie on the right hand of one's road, which in the Saxon tongue is called Sussex. There for the first time I saw the king in the king's house which is named Dene. And when I had been received by him with all kindness, he began to pray me earnestly to devote myself to his service and be of his household, and to leave for his sake all that I possessed on the western side of Severn, promising to recompense me with greater possessions." Asser however refused to forsake his home, and *Ælfred* was forced to be content with a promise of his return six months after. "And when he seemed satisfied with this reply, I gave him my pledge to return in a given time, and after four days took horse again and set out on my return to my country. But after I had left him and reached the city of Winchester a dangerous fever laid hold of me, and for twelve months and a week I lay with little hope of life. And when at the set time I did

CHAP. IV
Ælfred.
878-901.

¹ Asser (ed. Wise), p. 61.

CHAP. IV. not return to him as I had promised, he sent messengers to me to hasten my riding to him **Ælfred.** and seek for the cause of my delay. But as I could not take horse I sent another messenger back to him to show him the cause of my tarrying, and to declare that if I recovered from my infirmity I would fulfil the promise I had made. When my sickness then had departed, I devoted myself to the king's service on these terms, that I should stay with him for six months in every year if I could, or if not I should stay three months in Britain and three months in Saxon-land. So it came about that I made my way to him in the king's house which is called Leonaford, and was greeted by him with all honour. And that time I staid with him in his court through eight months, during which I read to him whatever books he would that we had at hand ; for it is his constant wont, whatever be the hindrances either in mind or body, by day and by night, either himself to read books aloud or to listen to others reading them.”¹

Birth of
English
Prose.

The work, however, which most told upon English culture was done not by these scholars but by Ælfred himself. The king's aim was simple and practical. He desired that “every youth now in England that is freeborn and has wealth enough be set to learn, as long as he is not fit for any other occupation, till they well know

¹ Asser (ed. Wise), pp. 47-51.

how to read English writing ; and let those be afterwards taught in the Latin tongue who are to continue learning and be promoted to a higher rank.”¹ For this purpose he set up, like Charles the Great, a school for the young nobles at his own court.² Books were needed for them as well as for the priests, to the bulk of whom Latin was a strange tongue, and the king set himself to provide English books for these readers. It was in carrying out this simple purpose that Ælfred changed the whole front of English literature. In the paraphrase of Cadmon, in the epic of Beowulf, in the verses of Northumbrian singers, in battle-songs and ballads, English poetry had already risen to a grand and vigorous life. But English prose hardly existed. Since Theodore’s time theology had been the favourite study of English scholars, and theology naturally took a Latin shape. Historical literature followed Bæda’s lead in finding a Latin vehicle of expression.³ Saints’ lives, which had now become numerous, were as yet always written in Latin. It was from Ælfred’s day that this tide of literary fashion suddenly turned. English prose started vigorously into life. Theology stooped to an English dress.⁴ History became

CHAP. IV.
Ælfred.
878-901.

¹ Pref. to *Pastoral* (ed. Sweet).

² Asser (ed. Wise), pp. 43, 44.

³ “The charters anterior to Ælfred are invariably in Latin.”—Palgrave, “Engl. Commonw.” i. 56.

⁴ From the time of Ælfred’s version of “The Pastoral Book,” religious works like Ælfric’s Homilies are written in English. In this vernacular theology England stood alone.

CHAP. IV. almost wholly vernacular.¹ The translation of Latin saint-lives into English became one of the most popular literary trades of the day. Even medicine found English interpreters. A national literature in fact sprang suddenly into existence which was without parallel in the western world.²

Ælfred. It is thus that in the literatures of modern Europe that of England leads the way. The

**Ælfred's
transla-
tions.**

¹ From the days of Ælfred to the eve of the Norman Conquest, when the "Vita Haroldi" forms an exception (for the *Encomium Emmae* is hardly of English origin), we possess only a single Latin historian, the ealdorman Æthelweard.

² "The old English writers," says Mr. Sweet, "did not learn the art of prose composition from Latin models; they had a native historical prose, which shows a gradual elaboration and improvement, quite independent of Latin or any other foreign influence. This is proved by an examination of the historical pieces inserted into the Chronicle. The first of these, the account of the death of Cynewulf and Cynehard, is composed in the abrupt disconnected style of oral conversation: it shows prose composition in its rudest and most primitive form, and bears a striking resemblance to the earliest Icelandic prose. In the detailed narrative of Ælfred's campaign and sea-fights the style assumes a different aspect; without losing the force and simplicity of the earlier pieces, it becomes refined and polished to a high degree, and yet shows no traces of foreign influence. Accordingly, in the 'Orosius,' the only translation of Ælfred's which from the similarity of its subject admits of a direct comparison, we find almost exactly the same language and style as in the contemporary historical pieces of the Chronicle. In the Bede, where the ecclesiastical prevails over the purely historical, the general style is less national, less idiomatic than in the 'Orosius,' and in purely theological works, such as the 'Pastoral,' the influence of the Latin original reaches its height. Yet even here there seems to be no attempt to engrave Latin idioms on the English version; the foreign influence is only indirect, chiefly showing itself in the occasional clumsiness that results from the difficulty of expressing and defining abstract ideas in a language unused to theological and metaphysical subtleties."—Introduction to *Pastoral Book* (E. E. Text Soc.), p. xli.

Romance tongues, the tongues of Italy, Gaul, and Spain, were only just emerging into definite existence when *Ælfred* wrote. Ulfilas, the first Teutonic prose writer, found no successors among his Gothic people; and none of the German folk across the sea were to possess a prose literature of their own for centuries to come. English therefore was not only the first Teutonic literature, it was the earliest prose literature of the modern world. And at the outset of English literature stands the figure of *Ælfred*. The mighty roll of books that fills our libraries opens with the translations of the king. He took his books as he found them; they were in fact the popular manuals of his day; the compilation of "Orosius," which was then the one accessible hand-book of universal history, the works of Baeda, the "Consolation" of Boethius, the Pastoral Book of Pope Gregory. "I wondered greatly," he says, "that of those good men who were aforetime all over England and who had learned perfectly these books, none would translate any part into their own language. But I soon answered myself and said, 'They never thought that men would be so reckless, and learning so fallen.'" As it was, however, the books had to be rendered into English by the king himself, with the help of the scholars he had gathered round him. "When I remembered," he says in his preface to the Pastoral Book,¹ "how the knowledge of

CHAP. IV.
Ælfred.
878-901.

¹ *Ælfred's Pastoral Book* (ed. Sweet).

CHAP. IV. Latin had formerly decayed throughout England, and yet many could read English writing, I began among other various and manifold troubles of this kingdom, to translate into English the book which is called in Latin *Pastoralis*, and in English *Shepherd's Book*, sometimes word by word, and sometimes according to the sense, as I had learnt it from Plegmund my archbishop, and Asser my bishop, and Grimbald my mass-priest, and John my mass-priest. And when I had learnt it as I could best understand it, and as I could most clearly interpret it, I translated it into English."

Their character.

Ælfred was too wise a man not to own the worth of such translations in themselves. The Bible, he urged with his cool common sense, had told on the nations through versions in their own tongues. The Greeks knew it in Greek. The Romans knew it in Latin. Englishmen might know it, as they might know the other great books of the world, in their own English. "I think it better therefore to render some books, that are most needful for men to know, into the language that we may all understand." But Ælfred showed himself more than a translator. He became an editor for his people. Here he omitted, there he expanded. He enriched his first translation, the "*Orosius*," by a sketch of new geographical discoveries in the north. He gave a West-Saxon form to his selections from Bæda. In one place he stops to explain his theory of government, his

wish for a thicker population, his conception of national welfare as consisting in a due balance of the priest, the thegn, and the churl. The mention of Nero spurs him to an outbreak against abuses of power. The cold acknowledgment of a Providence by Boethius gives way to an enthusiastic acknowledgment of the goodness of God.¹ As Ælfred writes his large-hearted nature flings off its royal mantle, and he talks as a man to men. "Do not blame me," he prays with a charming simplicity, "if any know Latin better than I, for every man must say what he says and do what he does according to his ability."²

Among his earliest undertakings was an English version of Bæda's history;³ and it was probably the making of this version which suggested the thought of a work which was to be memorable in our literature.⁴ Winchester, like most other episcopal monasteries, seems to have had its own Bishop's Roll, a series of meagre and irregular annals in the Latin tongue, for the most part mere jottings of the dates when West-Saxon bishop and

CHAP. IV.
Ælfred.
878-901.

The
English
Chronicle.

¹ See the instances given from his "Boethius" by Sharon Turner, "Hist. Ang. Sax." ii. cap. 2.

² Pref. to the "Boethius," Pauli's Ælfred, p. 174.

³ Pauli ("Life of Ælfred," p. 180) shows that the Bæda must have preceded the English rendering of the Chronicle, as this follows the version of Bæda in one of its most characteristic blunders.

⁴ In this sketch of the earlier history of the English Chronicle I have mainly followed Mr. Earle ("Two Saxon Chronicles Parallel," 1865, Introduction), whose minute analysis has placed the question of its composition on a critical basis.

CHAP. IV. West-Saxon King mounted throne and bishop-stool.
Ælfred. The story of this Roll and its aftergrowths has
878-901. been ingeniously traced by modern criticism ; and the general conclusions at which it has arrived seem probable enough. The entries of the Roll were posted up at uncertain intervals and with more or less accuracy from the days of the first West-Saxon bishop, Birinus. Meagre as they were, these earlier annals were historical in character and free from any mythical intermixture ; but save for a brief space in Ine's day they were purely West-Saxon,¹ and with the troubles which followed Ine's death they came to an end altogether. It was not until the revival of West-Saxon energy under Ecgberht that any effort was made to take up the record again and to fill up the gap that its closing had made.² But Swithun was probably the first to begin the series of developments which transformed this Bishop's Roll into a national history ; and the clerk to whom he entrusted its

¹ Earle finds a change in the Chronicle at 682. Ine reigned from 688. The annals still remained mere notes of the death and accession of kings and bishops, but were no longer confined to Wessex, including from this point like events in Northumbria, Mercia, and Kent (Earle, *Intr.* xi.). For the difficulties in the dates throughout this portion, from 682 to 755, see Stubbs's preface to his edition of "Roger of Hoveden," vol. i. pp. xxxv. et. seq.

² The meagre and irregular entries from 758, which Earle styles (*Intr.* xii.) "mere chronography, an ineffectual attempt to fill out the tale of years with corresponding events," may have been thrown together just after Ecgberht's accession, as there is a break in the genealogical preface that precedes them which suggests that it originally closed with Ecgberht's predecessor, Beorhtric.

compilation continued the Roll by a series of military and political entries to which we owe our knowledge of the reign of *Æthelwulf*, while he enlarged and revised the work throughout, prefixing to its opening those broken traditions of the coming of our fathers,¹ which, touched as they are here and there by mythical intermixture, remain the one priceless record of the conquest of Britain.²

It was this Latin chronicle of Swithun's clerk that *Ælfred* seems to have taken in hand about 887, and whose whole character he changed by giving it an English form.³ In its earlier portions he carried still further the process of expansion. An introduction dating from the birth of Christ, drawn from the work of *Bæda*, was added to its opening, and entries from the same source were worked into the after-annals.⁴ But it was where

¹ For the worth of these traditions, see Earle (Intr. ix. x.) and my "Making of England," i. 31, note.

² Though hardly attributable to Swithun's own pen, Mr. Earle (Intr. xiv.) has little doubt of the composition of this Chronicle "during his episcopate and at his see." The date of its compilation is shown by the "genealogical demonstration" (p. xii.) with which it closes at the death of *Æthelwulf*. So far as we can see the work was still in Latin.

³ Pauli dates *Ælfred*'s chronicle-work as "soon after 890" ("Life of *Ælfred*," 180, 191). Earle however shows the probability of 887 for the king's first compilation, as not only is there a distinct change in the character of the entries at this point, but Asser must have had in his hands a chronicle which ended in 887, the information he draws from that quarter ending in that year. (Earle, Intr. xv.)

⁴ As far, that is, as *Bæda* goes, to 731. From 449 to 731, the entries for thirty-one years are wholly, and those for twelve more partially, drawn from *Bæda*.

CHAP. IV.

Ælfred.878-901.Its growth
under
Ælfred.

CHAP. IV. Swithun's work ended that *Ælfred's* own work
Ælfred. really began, for it is from the death of *Æthelwulf*
878-901. that the Roll widens into a continuous narrative, a narrative full of life and originality, whose vigour and freshness mark the gift of a new power to the English tongue. The appearance of such a work in their own mother speech could not fail to produce a deep impression on the people whose story it told. With it English history became the heritage of the English people. Bæda had left it accessible merely to noble or priest ; *Ælfred* was the first to give it to the people at large. Nor was this all. The tiny streams of historic record which had been dispersed over the country at large were from this time drawn into a single channel. The Chronicle, for from this time we may use the term by which the work has become famous, served even more than the presence of the Dane to put an end to the existence of distinct annals in Northumbria and Mercia,¹ and to help on the progress of national unity by reflecting everywhere the same national consciousness.

When his work on Bæda was finished *Ælfred*,

¹ Stubbs (Pref. to Hoveden, i. xi.) points out that its publication had possibly "the same effect on the previously existing materials and schemes of history that the publication of Higden's Polychronicon had in the fourteenth, and the invention of printing in the fifteenth centuries. It stopped the writing of new books, and insured the destruction of the old." To this cause he attributes the want of any distinctly Northumbrian history of the ninth century, in spite of the existence of scholars at York till after the invasion and settlement of the Danes.

it is thought, began his translation of the Consolation of Boethius ; and it is not improbable¹ that the metrical translation of the Metra of Boethius was also from his hand. From philosophy and this effort at poetry he turned to give to his people a book on practical theology. As far as we know the translation of the Pastoral Rule of Pope Gregory was his last work ; and of all his translations it was the most carefully done. It is only as we follow the king in the manifold activity of his life that we understand his almost passionate desire for that “ stillness ” which was essential to his work. But it was only by short spaces that the land was “ still,” and once more Ælfred’s work of peace was to be broken off by a renewal of the old struggle. Five years indeed had passed since the last attack ; but with the death of Guthrum-Æthelstan in 890² the king lost his hold on East Anglia ; and though the frith between the two nations was not only renewed, but secured by the giving of hostages, Ælfred must have seen that it needed but a little aid from without to rouse the men of the Danelaw to a renewal of their attack on Wessex. And at this juncture the aid from without suddenly offered itself ; for the fortunes of England were swayed by a revolution which was going on in the north.

Through the years that followed the Peace of

¹ “Geschichte der Englischen Litteratur,” p. 101. Rd. ten Brink. (A. S. G.)

² Eng. Chron. a. 890.

CHAP. IV.

Ælfred.

878-901.

Renewal
of war.

CHAP. IV. Wedmore the movement towards unity which the northmen had furthered by their descents on the English peoples took a new vigour in their own homeland ; the old isolation of fiord from fiord, and dale from dale, began to break down ; and the little commonwealths which had held so jealously aloof from each other were drawn together whether they would or no. Great kingdoms thus grew up in each of the three regions of Scandinavia. Norway was the first to become a single monarchy. Legend told how one of its many rulers, Harald of Westfold, sent his men to bring him Gytha of Hordaland, a girl whom he had chosen for his wife ; and how Gytha sent his men back again with taunts at the lord of so petty a realm. The taunts went home, and Harald swore “Never will I clip or comb my hair till I have mastered all Norway with scatt and dues and king’s domains, or died in the trying.”¹ So every springtide came war and hosting, harrying and burning, till in 883 a great fight at Hafursfiord settled the matter,² and Harald “Ugly Head,” as men called him while the strife lasted, was free to shear his locks again, and became Harald Harfager, or “Fair-hair.”³

¹ Harald Fair-hair’s Saga, c. v. Laing’s “Sea Kings,” i. 274.

² *Ibid.* 287. A poem on the battle speaks of English and Scottish warriors and some from the Frankish coast as engaged in it. These were of course simply Vikings who had gathered from these quarters for the strife. The battle was partly decided by “the fierce stone-storm’s pelting rain,” which formed a marked feature in all northern fighting.

³ *Ibid.* p. 292.

The revolution gave fresh life to the pirate raids abroad, for the northmen loved no master, and a great multitude fled out of the country, some pushing as far as Iceland and colonizing it; some sailing southward and waging war against their new lord from the Orkneys and Shetlands.¹ From these haunts, however, Harald drove them at last, sweeping the coast as far as Man summer after summer,² and setting up an earldom in the Orkneys, which furnished a new base of operations against the kingdom of the Scots, while the sea-kings steered southward to join Guthrum's host in the Rhine-country, or Hasting in the Channel.³ The impulse which the new-comers gave was sorely needed by the Wikings, for the bolder temper of Western Christendom was giving fresh vigour to the struggle against them. At the close of 891 the pirates were beaten by King Arnulf on the Dyle in a fight so decisive that they never after attempted to settle on German soil; and even Hasting, master as he still was of northern Frankland, saw his host worn out by the resolute attacks of King Odo. It was time to seek new fields, and famine quickened the sea-kings' resolve. In 893 a fleet of two hundred and fifty vessels gathered

CHAP. IV.

Alfred.878-901.Invasion of
Hasting.

¹ Harald Fair-hair's Saga, c. v. Laing's "Sea Kings," i. p. 288.

² *Ibid.* p. 291.

³ If we follow the Saga, with Skene ("Celtic Scotland," i. 336, note, and 344, note), Hafursfjord may be dated in 883, and the Wikings' expulsion from the Orkneys, with the foundation of the earldom, had taken place before 893.

CHAP. IV. at Boulogne, and steering for the port of Lymne
Ælfred. the pirates established themselves in the neighbouring
878-901. Andredswæld ;¹ while shortly after Hasting himself with eighty ships entered the Thames, and pushing up the Swale into northern Kent, formed his winter-camp at Milton.

**Rising
of the
Danelaw.** In the spring of 894 they pushed their raids into Hampshire and Berkshire ; but the success of their enterprise hung on the co-operation of the Danelaw. The compact with Ælfred however was still fresh, and the English Danes remained quiet,² while the king, who had detached his son Eadward with a small force to watch the pirate-host through the winter, and stationed ealdorman Æthelred within the walls of London to hold the line of the Thames, himself by skilful encampments held the two bodies of his assailants for a year at bay, and imprisoned them within the bounds of the Weald. For a while the king had hopes of ending the war by a new treaty such as that of Wedmore. Hasting swore to refrain from further ravages, and confirmed his oath by giving hostages, and suffering his two boys to be baptized ;³ but the negotiations were a mere blind, and the good faith

¹ Eng. Chron. a. 893. The "Mickle wood, that we call Andred, was from east to west a hundred and twelve miles long or longer, and thirty miles broad."

² After the landing of Hasting "Northumbrians and East-Engle had given oaths to Ælfred, and the East-Engle six hostages" (Eng. Chron. a. 894). This however did not hinder them from joining the Danes, though not as yet in any general fashion.

³ Æthelweard, a. 894, lib. iv. c. 3.

WEST BRITAIN.



same scale as South Britain.

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of the English Danes yielded at last to the call of their kinsmen. The forces in the Andredswæld threw themselves by a rapid march across the Thames ; and Ælfred had hardly gathered men to strengthen the army which beset them in their camp on the Colne when the secret of this movement was revealed by a rising of the whole Dane-law in their aid.

CHAP. IV.
Ælfred.
878-901.

The rising, however, only brought out the new strength of Ælfred's realm. Its policy of defence was set aside for a policy of rapid and energetic attack. The king's son Eadward, who may have ruled in the Eastern Kingdom of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, with the Mercian ealdorman Æthelred, added to their force the men of London, fell suddenly on the pirates' camp in Essex at a moment when it was stripped of defenders, and sank the ships moored within its entrenchment. The danger however was as great in the west as in the east, for the Danes again found allies in the Welsh. They were no doubt summoned to that quarter by the house of Roderic, which was now greatly harassed by the petty princes of the border who owned Ælfred's supremacy. While a fleet from East Anglia therefore coasted round to West Wales and moored off Exeter, the host from the Colne, which had formed a new camp at Shoebury, suddenly struck past London along the line of the Thames, and crossing the Cotswolds into the Severn valley ravaged the lands of Ælfred's

The fight
with the
Danes.

CHAP. IV. allies. *Ælfred* however in person held Exeter against attack from the West-Welsh and Cornwealas, while Eadward and *Æthelred* nerved themselves for a final blow in the west. Gathering forces "from every township east of Parret, and both east and west of the Selwood, and also north of Thames, and west of the Severn," from almost all *Ælfred's* England in fact, save the western parts which were supplying the king's own camp on the Exe, and aided by "some part of the North-Welsh people," they caught the pirate host in the Severn valley at Buttington, forced it after a siege of some weeks to fight, defeated it with a great slaughter, and again drove it to its old quarters in Essex.

*Defeat of
the Danes.*

Fresh supplies of fighting men, however, from the Danelaw enabled Hasting to repeat his dash upon the west, and, marching day and night across Mid-Britain, to find a stronghold within the walls of Chester. The strength of the house of Roderic lay in this quarter of Wales, and the occupation of Chester must have aimed at securing their co-operation. Deserted as the city was, its Roman walls were too strong to force, but by a close investment of the place through the winter *Æthelred* at last drove the northmen from their hold, though he was unable to follow them as they hurried through North Wales, and by a wide circuit through Northumbria again withdrew to a

camp on the Lea.¹ Here they were joined by their brethren from the Channel, who, foiled before Exeter, fell back ravaging along the coast to the Thames. A rout of the Londoners, who attacked them in 895, proved the strength of their camp on the Lea some twenty miles from the great city, and through harvest-tide the king, who had now come up from the west, contented himself with watching it "while the people reaped their crops." But meanwhile he was preparing for a decisive stroke. The whole of the Danish ships had entered the Lea in 896, and lay under shelter of the camp, when the pirates suddenly found the river-course blocked by two strong fortresses. The retreat of their boats to the Thames and sea was thus wholly cut off,² and the forced abandonment of their fleet, as the pirates struck again from their camp to the Severn, practically ended the war. After a month in their camp at Bridgenorth the Danish host broke up in 897. East Anglian and West Anglian returned to their home in the Danelaw, while the followers of Hasting retreated to their former quarters across the Channel.³

"No wise man should desire a soft life," Ælfred had written some years before this last struggle with the Danes, "if he careth for any worship here from the world, or for eternal life after this

CHAP. IV.
Ælfred.
878-901.

¹ Eng. Chron. a. 895. This seems the meaning of a corrupt passage in Æthelweard.

² Eng. Chron. a. 896.

³ *Ibid.* 897.

CHAP. IV. life is over."¹ His own life had certainly been
Alfred. no soft one. Though he had hardly reached fifty
878-901. years of age, incessant labour and care had told
on the vigour of his youth, and he must have
already felt the first touches of the weakness that
was to bring him to the grave. But he was still
a mighty hunter, waking the stillness of the "Itene
Wood," along the Southampton Water, or the
stiller reaches of the Cornish moorlands, with
hound and horn;² and his life was marked by
the same vivid activity as of old. To the scholars
he gathered round him he was the very type of a
scholar, snatching every hour he could find to read
or listen to books read to him.³ The singers of
his court found in him a brother singer, gathering
the old songs of his people to teach them to his
children,⁴ breaking his renderings from the Latin
with simple verse, or solacing himself in hours of
depression with the music of the Psalms. He
carried in his bosom a little handbook in which he

¹ Transl. of Boethius, in Sharon Turner, "Hist. Ang. Sax." ii. 48.

² "In omni venatoria arte industrius venator incessabiliter laborat non in vanum, nam incomparabilis omnibus peritia et felicitate in illa arte sicut et in cæteris omnibus Dei donis fuit, sicut et nos sæpiissime vidimus."—Asser (ed. Wise), p. 16.

³ "Haec est propria et usitatissima illius consuetudo die noctuque, inter omnia alia mentis et corporis impedimenta, aut per se ipsum libros recitare aut aliis recitantibus audire."—Asser (ed. Wise), p. 50.

⁴ In his boyhood "Saxonica poemata die noctuque solers auditor relatu aliorum sæpiissime audiens docibilis memoriter retinebat."—Asser (ed. Wise), p. 16. For his later life see *ib.* p. 43.

